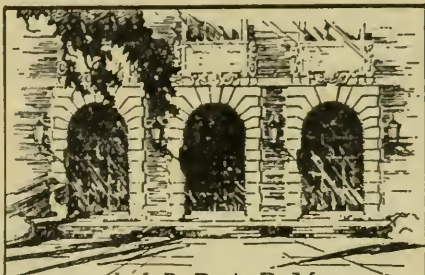


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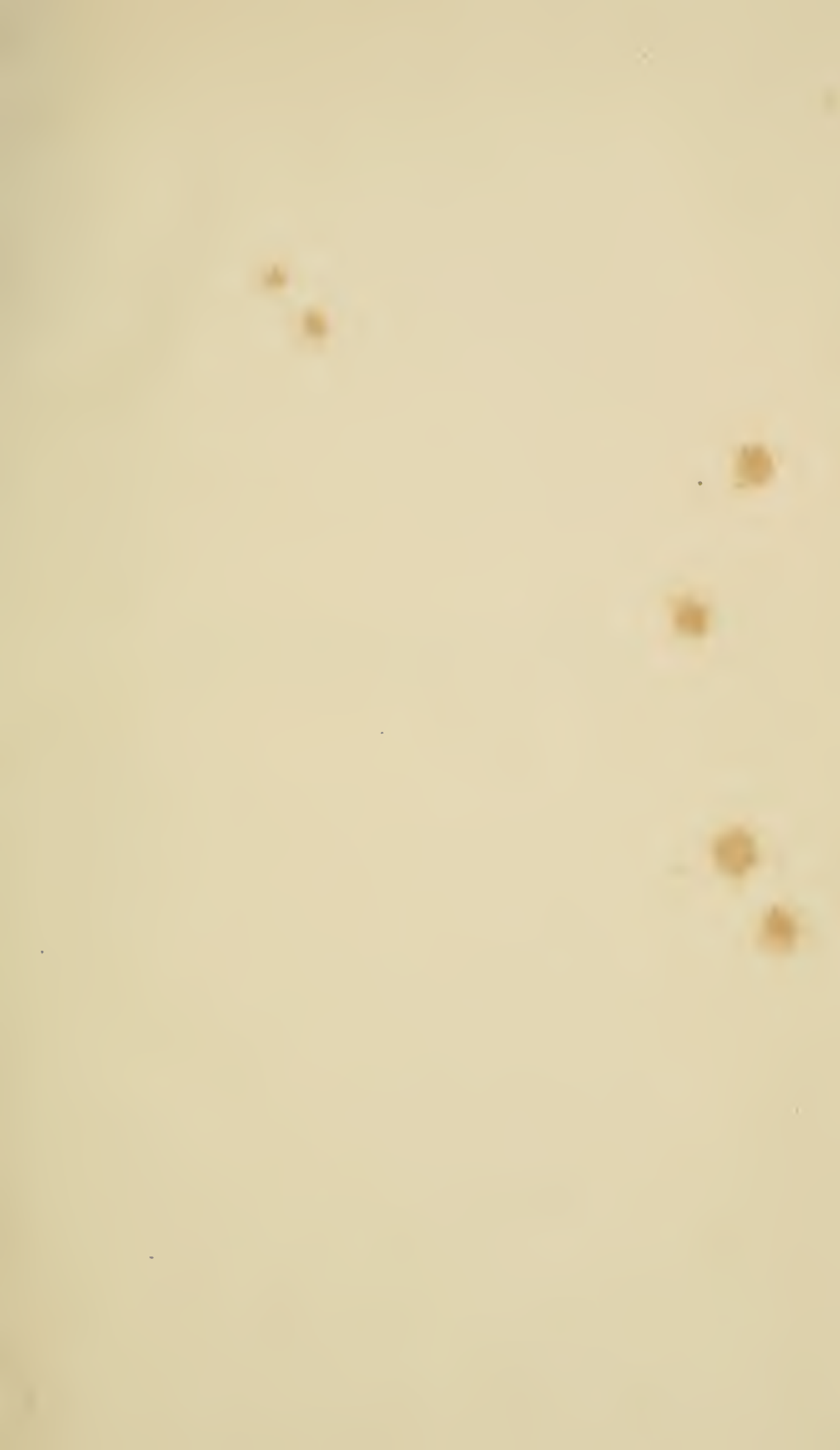




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BEYMINSTRE.

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WORKS—NEWTON.

BEYMINSTRE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“LENA,” “KING’S COPE,” “MR. WARENNE,”

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

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BEYMINSTRE.

CHAPTER I.

It was the last day of the year. Mrs. Arnold and Regina had travelled about England during the summer and autumn, and had returned to Holmwood a few days before Christmas. It was a damp rainy day, such as always hung heavy on Regina's spirits. Her thoughts were then apt to revert to Alban, and she wondered why he had never written to her grandmama since he replied to the letter in which she had announced to him his mother's death. His answer had consisted of a few lines only, expressing in strong and earnest terms his gratitude to Mrs. Arnold and Regina for their devoted care of his mother; but it contained

no allusion to his own feelings, whether of present sorrows or future hopes. It was dated from the camp, on the eve of one of our great victories in Scinde.

"I do think, grandmama, he might have written," said Regina, pausing in her work, "after such a battle! He knew how anxious we should be."

"I did not expect it, my child; he has no plea; the papers told us all that he could—all that he *would*, I am sure. He is not expansive, I am convinced, even when not under the pressure of immediate sorrow."

"He shall not be reserved to me!" cried Regina.

"He will not when you meet," replied Mrs. Arnold.

"And, perhaps, he may be coming home very soon!" exclaimed Regina. "I should never be surprised to see him walk coolly into the room. Every one says the war will soon be ended; and I cannot think he will be less anxious than myself for our meeting. No! that would be too humiliating!"

Mrs. Arnold sat thoughtful; she was turning

over in her mind whether she had done wisely to prevent an engagement. Regina's feelings *were* involved. Of what use was it, then, to leave her unfettered? She had to recall all the arguments she had then employed to Mrs. Willingham before she could assure herself that she had done right.

"Don't ponder, granny!" cried Regina, suddenly flinging her arms round Mrs. Arnold's knees, as she sat on a foldstool at her feet. "Don't look anxious; I'll sweep it all out of my mind; I'll not think of Alban till he comes home. And, if he can forget me—oh, the future! the future!"

"How much we are spared, my Regina, that we cannot lift the veil!" said Mrs. Arnold. "Well, Marianne, what is it?"

"A gentleman wanting to see Miss Howard," said the servant.

"Alban!" whispered Regina, as her grandmama took up the card.

"Mr. Reynard! Beg him to walk up-stairs," said the old lady.

"Somebody from India! some one who has lately seen Alban, and brings us news of him!"

cried Regina. Her heart beat fast; her cheek flushed; she clasped her hands together.

A sallow, middle-aged man, with the eye of a serpent, stood in the doorway, and begged in a bland voice to know which of the two ladies before him was Miss Howard.

Mrs. Arnold set him right on this dubious point, and begged him to be seated.

He observed very mildly that he had been the solicitor of the late Sir Herbert Willingham, and inclined his head gently towards Regina as he spoke.

“The *late* Sir Herbert! Is he then dead? Poor man!” and her thoughts instantly turned upon Sir Alban Willingham of Beyminstre, with a flash of triumph—Alban, whose wishes were fulfilled at last; a noble fortune, a lofty position in the country, an undoubted right to both in his ancestral name—and not a pang of regret; for he had not loved, not known the dead—not so much as she had; yet the poor broken-hearted old man came before her, and her eyes filled with tears.

“The last time I saw Sir Herbert was at the

grave of a very dear friend ; I don't know what I am crying for," she said, in her natural way, as she dashed away her tears.

"Such emotion is highly creditable to both parties," said the lawyer; "but I will, if you please, proceed to explain the motive for my visit. I must premise that, from the date of that lady's death (to whom, I believe, Miss Howard, you alluded), Sir Herbert gradually declined, and died, I may say without any organic disease, one week ago. His will was opened yesterday. You are probably aware of his fortune and estate; but it may surprise you a little when I inform you, that he has bequeathed all of which he died possessed, without any reservation, to yourself, Regina Howard of Holmwood, in the county of Kent."

"No, no!" cried Regina, starting from her chair with a look of horror. "No! his nephew, Sir Alban Willingham, is his heir! He cannot leave it away; it is entailed—I have often been told so! Grandmama, tell him! speak!—I will take nothing!"

"Indeed, Mr. Reynard, I think you will find it

so," said Mrs. Arnold, gently. "We were acquainted with Mr. Willingham from our great intimacy with his mother: we have therefore heard his future prospects mentioned as beyond a doubt. Sir Herbert was very eccentric; but he has doubtless, in this bequest, exceeded his own powers. You know better than I the laws of entail. But I trust Sir Alban will soon be in the country to defend his own rights. Believe me, they shall meet with no opposition on our side. We shall ground nothing on this very whimsical bequest."

"Nothing! nothing!" echoed Regina.

"Madam," said the lawyer, drawing his chair a little nearer to Mrs. Arnold, "the entail was cut off six-and-twenty years ago—before the birth of the present Sir Alban. Perhaps you know the outline of Sir Herbert's history. You are aware of the terms on which he stood with his brother. The colonel behaved very ill, certainly. He tried to take out a commission of lunacy against Sir Herbert; and then his marriage—a proceeding that was hardly justifiable, I should say; but he has

behaved worse than all to his son. He sold his birthright for a mess of pottage; and signed away his chance of the estate for the sum of fifty thousand pounds, which he scattered to the winds in less than two years."

Regina had dropped on the sofa like a wounded bird, and was gazing restlessly about, uncertain what to do.

"This has been kept a profound secret until now," pursued the lawyer. "The colonel, fearing the effects of such knowledge on his creditors when the money should be spent, exacted from his brother a promise of secrecy during his life. Sir Herbert was willing to give it; his only object (that of dispossessing the children of his brother and the lady who had deceived him) was equally answered, without his feeling compelled to enter the marriage state—against which his early disappointment had given him a decided objection. So that you, Miss Howard, are the possessor of Beyminstre, with a rent-roll of fourteen thousand a year. Allow me to offer you my congratulations."

“Grandmama,” faltered Regina, white even to her lips, “this cannot be!—I must get rid of this in some way: a great injustice has been done!”

“Perhaps, sir,” said Mrs. Arnold, “you will allow us to apply to you professionally respecting the forms necessary to be gone through to transfer this property to the heir-at-law. It would be a most serious cause of regret to both of us, if we were to delay doing so for an hour longer than we could help. As you must be intimately acquainted with the affairs of the late Sir Herbert, we could not put our case, I am sure, in better hands.”

“I cannot but admire such great delicacy of feeling,” said the lawyer; “but while Miss Howard continues a minor, I believe she can do nothing in the matter; and there are conditions in the will which I think—if I am not mistaken—would make it difficult at any future time. But one of my duties remains yet to be fulfilled; I am to put into Miss Howard’s hands a letter addressed to her by the late Sir Herbert, found in his writing-desk after his decease.”

“I should be glad if you would favour us with another visit to-morrow,” said Mrs. Arnold, as Regina took the letter. “My grand-daughter is not very strong, and this intelligence has painfully affected her; and there is much yet to be discussed between us, in which I hope you will kindly give us the benefit of your advice.”

“I trust that letter will entirely do away with your scruples,” said the lawyer, bowing himself to the door; “I shall have the honour, madam, of waiting upon you to-morrow.”

“Don’t trust him, granny! don’t ask his advice!” cried Regina, violently agitated. “I hate him, with his serpent eyes! Perhaps there is no will, after all!”

“My dearest child, be patient; read your letter,” said Mrs. Arnold, soothingly.

Regina tore it open. It was dated the day of Mrs. Willingham’s funeral. It contained these words:—

“On this day many years ago, Regina, the pale woman whom you and I have followed to her

grave, was lost to me for ever by a sharper stroke than death. I loved her as I trust, for your sake, you may never love any human being. Her face haunted me like a vision, her voice rang in my ears sleeping or waking, her silvery farewell filled the air till we met again. If to have one intense prevailing idea and perception is madness, I was, and still am, mad! From the hour I first saw her, she filled my whole being with one grave charm! I thought she loved me, and I went a journey on some pressing business with as firm a trust in her as in Heaven's mercy! I was recalled by a letter that informed me she had eloped with my brother. I will not speak of the early days after my trial—I dare not think much of that time; but afterwards, when my hatred was still living, my revenge not cooled, I made a vow that no child of theirs should ever inherit Beyminstre, should ever sit beside that hearth whose light she had extinguished. The husband was soon in great need; for a large sum, and under a pledge of secrecy, he agreed to cut off the entail, and Beyminstre was at last my own. I knew that, not even to close

its doors against them and theirs, could I ever bring a bride across that threshold; but now it was mine, and I could leave it to an hospital. Well, when she was alone and poor, and was come to Holmwood, and time had softened but not healed my wound, I began to repent of my oath; and then, Regina, by degrees it came into my mind, that I could restore through you what I had sworn I never would bestow on her son. I saw you loved each other—do you not? yet I would not bind you. If he should prove like his father, or if your regard be less than I suppose, take freely what I give, and use it as you will. But I am not in error here; you promised, as we knelt beside his dying mother, that you would aid me in my task: I call upon your help. Let my last act, through you, prove my forgiveness.

“HERBERT WILLINGHAM.”

“I swear it!” said Regina, trembling from head to foot; “but, granny, from this time Alban is lost to me!”

“My dearest! lost to you?”

“How little he knew Alban!” she exclaimed. “If any thing in the world could alienate him from me, it is this! To receive his rightful inheritance at the hands of any living being, he never will bear it; he never will look upon me with the same feelings again!”

“My dear child, if Alban is generous, he will surely accept at your hands what you would have taken at his. He will feel sure that it is by no effort, no trickery, that you become possessed of his estate. He will be convinced that your only thought is how you may restore it to the right owner.”

“But will you write to him, granny, and tell him that I am trying to get rid of it before I come of age; and that if I cannot—if he *must* wait till then—that is, if no other plan occurs to him—oh, granny!” said Regina bursting into tears, “but for this, he would not need to be reminded of the terms on which we stood.”

“My little Regina, we must first learn whether you can *ever* resign it—if not, he must submit to take you with the property, as Sir Herbert proposes.”

“Oh, granny! that is what his pride will never stoop to do.”

“My dear child, if he loves you as I believe, his pride must accommodate to circumstances; but there is another point to be considered, my Regina. You are neither of you fettered in any way. Absence may have weakened in him those feelings, which nothing has occurred to efface in your mind, and then I feel assured that, not even for the sake of Beyminstre would he come forward to claim your hand.”

“Oh, granny! that may well be!” cried Regina, hiding her face in her hands.

“In that case, my child, it would be awkward to *offer* the estate; it would be inviting a refusal. Should he return to England, and make no advances towards renewing your acquaintance, it will then be better that you wait quietly until you are able to transfer the property to him; and then do it, without any reference to his wishes, through the hands of a lawyer. But, on his return, he can hardly avoid paying a visit to the friends who closed the eyes of his mother; and then, I do not,

my little Regina, anticipate a very long estrangement between you."

"And the old lady gazed fondly at the beautiful face that was uplifted to hers.

"But could not you write to him, granny, just to say that we regret the bequest, and are doing all in our power to restore it?"

"My dear, reflect. He may say, 'These are words; in three years your mind may alter, you may marry, and your husband may insist on retaining Beyminstre.' This is not what I think, but what he may say."

"But still to sit down quiet, and let him imagine——"

"My love, what can he imagine of you that is to your disadvantage? He ought to know you well! Let this be a test of his love, of his esteem! Better a thousandfold, my Regina, lose him now, than find out too late that his heart was not large enough for faith, nor for that greater generosity which consists, not in *giving*, but in *receiving* gracefully."

"I accept the trial, dearest granny," said Regina; "I too will have faith in Alban. He will be

very much annoyed and mortified at first, that is natural; but he will come home one day, and ask me if I am still in the same mind, and Beyminstre will be quite a secondary consideration with both of us; it will not matter who first had it."

"My little Regina," said Mrs. Arnold tenderly, "can you remember, a long time ago, that you once wished you might become very rich?"

"Yes, granny; but not this way."

"So it is, my darling, what we wish we sometimes have, but rarely indeed in the manner we pictured to ourselves. Perhaps this trial may be sent to teach you what you never could have learned otherwise—of how little value is mere wealth. It is, and always will be, the world's idol; but it cannot buy one single precious thing. Here are you longing to get rid of fourteen thousand a year, and caring very little whether Mrs. Chillingworth invites you, or forgets your existence. Only, my Regina, be patient!"

"Dearest granny!" cried Regina, embracing her, "as long as I have you, my troubles are merely shadows, and patience is hardly a virtue."

CHAPTER II.

THE lawyer came the next morning, and gave them several details respecting Sir Herbert's life. He had, as Regina suspected, been a frequent visitor at the house on the common, in which he had placed his old servant, on the understanding that he should find a home there, whenever it suited him to leave his own neighbourhood, for the sake of a more absolute seclusion than he could obtain at Beyminstre. That Mrs. Willingham should have sought a refuge at Holmwood, was one of those strange coincidences which so often astonish us in real life.

Mrs. Arnold, with Lord Oswestry, a near relation of Sir Herbert, were named Regina's guardians till she came of age, or married. As the earl was not now in England, Mr. Reynard had sent to

apprise him of the fact ; and in the mean time Mrs. Arnold was fully competent to arrange all that was necessary at present. Fifteen hundred a year was suggested by Lord Oswestry's solicitor, in concert with Mr. Reynard, as an allowance for Miss Howard during her minority, and this Mrs. Arnold readily accepted. " We will not touch it, my Regina," she said ; " it may lie at the banker's ; and, when you restore the estate, you can also give that back, or lay it out in improvements at Beyminstre."

" I shall never, never live there, granny !" cried Regina.

" If you can restore Beyminstre, my love, well and good ; but if not, it will become your duty to live on the estate ; it must not stand vacant waiting for the next heir. Think how the poor would suffer."

Mr. Reynard, on his next visit, thought it very uncertain that the transfer could be accomplished ; there was a clause in the will relating to Regina's children, which could not, he thought, be got over.

" But if I do not marry ?" asked Regina, eagerly.

“Then the estate, at your death, can be bequeathed to whom you please; that is stipulated.”

“But then, good gracious! why can I not now, immediately, enter into an agreement to give it up, and remain always single?”

The lawyer with a smile remarked, that such a step would be attended with some objections—and that, at any rate, she had three years before her during which nothing could be done. Even Mrs. Arnold seemed to think this rather a strong measure. She thought, what Regina could not then believe, that, if Alban was alienated from her, it might occur as a possibility, in after years, that she might form another attachment. And now Regina began to learn by experience what “the law’s delay” meant in Hamlet’s use of the term—namely, as a very strong inducement (unless people knew better) to commit suicide; and a great improvement in savage cruelty upon any of the quaint devices of a ruder age.

Sometimes Mr. Reynard was quite sure that the transfer could be accomplished easily to-morrow, or next day; and he consulted some great authority,

for which Mrs. Arnold had to pay a round sum of money, and the oracle had declared that there was not the slightest impediment to Miss Howard presenting it to, say the Duke of Wellington, or the Foundling Hospital, or any thing or body in the world; and therefore, if she was in earnest, he would put the proper documents in hand at once.

And when Regina, all joy and gratitude, gave him every assurance that she meant what she said, the next thing was a large letter (also very expensive), which informed her that the advice of another oracle had been taken—for it is a solemn achievement to give away fourteen thousand a year—and that the last oracle had said that it was an utter impossibility, both now and ever, for Miss Howard to dispossess herself of Beyminstre, and that, if it did not descend to her children by reason of her having none, it must go to her heir-at-law, and, who that would turn out to be, she knew as much as Mr. Reynard; for she had none but very distant relations—so distant as to be quite out of sight; and if this sort of thing had happened eight or ten times, many people

would have thought it very disagreeable; but it went on for nearly two years, fretting and harassing her worse than sickness, and sometimes causing her some astonishment that Mr. Reynard, who had made the will, knew so little what it meant, and was constantly going about to all the cleverest counsel in town, entreating them (at Mrs. Arnold's expense) to explain to him what he had written himself.

Indeed, Regina, prejudiced by his serpent eyes, sometimes thought that it must be for some private motive that he kept her in suspense, and sent in every six months to her grandmama half a dozen neatly written folio sheets, tacked together at the top corner; but people who study physiognomy are apt to judge harshly, and Mr. Reynard was known to be quite as scrupulous as any solicitor living; and here was a widow and orphan who knew nothing—less than children—about business. He could not take advantage of her. Impossible!

And now the war in India had been brought to a brilliant conclusion. Regina had followed

step by step, the route of the conquering army, with a feverish, tearful eagerness that did no good to her health.

At last a paper mentioned that Sir Alban Willingham was on his way to Egypt on sick leave, in consequence of a neglected wound, and the editor trusted that the sea voyage might restore the health of so promising an officer, who had distinguished himself at the battle of Sobraon, and in an affair at a hill fort with a bewildering name.

Regina now broke down altogether. The idea of Alban sick, disappointed, friendless—now that his mother was dead, and she estranged from him—overwhelmed her. Her spirit would have carried her through a great deal, but her health would not.

People began to say, that she looked as if she would not long enjoy the great fortune she had come into: as if she had enjoyed it hitherto.

So that Mrs. Arnold, at her wits' end, thought she would write to Alban; any thing that might elicit some reply, instead of keeping up this

strange prolonged silence ; but this was a very difficult undertaking, for the lawyers seemed now quite agreed that Regina could not, during her lifetime, transfer the estate to the heir-at-law ; still it was to make Regina more tranquil, and she wrote :—

“ I have been hitherto fearful lest you should mistake my motive in writing to you. I am now more fearful that you may mistake my silence. You may think my grandchild accepts the strange bequest of your relative, and perhaps rejoices in her good fortune. It is due to both of you to say, that she has been incessantly occupied, since the day when the news reached her, in trying to relinquish the estate ; and that the lawyers’ decision, that this cannot be done during her lifetime, has very seriously affected her health.

“ It will not surprise you that I should feel a deep interest in the son of my very dear lost friend ; I have traced that portion of your career which the papers have recorded, with much anxiety, and

a little pride; and it will always be a pleasure to me to hear of your welfare, though I may not live to take you by the hand again.—Your sincere friend,

“REGINA ARNOLD (NÉE DE LAVAL.)”

“I should have liked to seal it with that pretty ring his dear mother gave me,” said Mrs. Arnold as she concluded her letter; “but I have mislaid it somewhere.”

“And I am afraid that I am the culprit,” said Regina; “the last time Winny Hopper called, I had borrowed it of you, and was sealing with it. I remember I would not give it back lest she should make some remark, and ask to see it.”

“Ay, I recollect, my love; it will turn up one day when we least expect it.”

Regina’s spirits rose at once. She took the letter to the post herself with an eagerness that she had not known for a long time. She returned to the house quite gay, and found Mr. Brand sitting with her grandmama.

He did not come to see them so often as he

used to do—quite as friendly to Regina, quite as respectful to Mrs. Arnold when they did meet, they each had new avocations which tended to keep them apart. The new rector was a non-resident, and the care of a straggling parish devolved entirely upon Mr. Brand. And, since this unlucky bequest, Mrs. Arnold had spent a good deal of time in London—partly to be near her legal advisers, but more that she might afford Regina the advantage and the distraction of masters, both in music and painting; and the still greater improvement of hearing the first performers, and studying the masterpieces of art. And she was glad to withdraw her grandchild as much as possible from a neighbourhood which now sought to overwhelm her with attentions, that had their origin in her accession of fortune, and that would subside as quickly if she succeeded in renouncing the estate.

But Mr. Brand had still another motive to render his visits less frequent. Ever since Mrs. Arnold's increase of property, he had made the discovery that he was attached to Regina. He had always

admired and liked her extremely—always been amused with her—always delighted to provoke her playful attacks; but he was not able to marry, and he thought his feelings quite under his control. And it may be observed, that he shewed himself very unlike the average of his sex, in paying no more serious attention to Regina than he had done before. He had delicacy enough to refrain from making overtures to her prospects, which he had not thought it worth while to do when she was comparatively poor.

But she remained his ideal of all that is most engaging and graceful in woman; and Winny Hopper always thought that it was her troublesome image that prevented her (Winny) from triumphing over his heart.

“And how has Miss Howard been this long time?” asked Mr. Brand, as he rose to meet her.

“Quite well,” said Regina cheerfully, as she took her seat by Mrs. Arnold.

“Really, Mrs. Arnold,” he remarked in a low tone, “I never saw Miss Howard looking better.”

“What! has grandmama been complaining of

me?" inquired Regina affectionately; "she is too anxious."

"Not without reason," said the old lady; "I don't like my child to grow so thin, or to look so transparent as she still does."

"Is that study, Miss Howard?"

"No—lawyers," said Regina.

"A very harassing complaint," Mr. Brand remarked.

"A very tedious one;" rejoined Mrs. Arnold.

"If all the lawyers were burnt, would any body be sorry?" asked Regina.

"I have a brother a barrister," returned Mr. Brand.

"That's different—I meant solicitors," cried Regina.

"Their solicitations are something like those of the robber in *Gil Blas*," said Mr. Brand laughing, "who asked alms with a loaded carbine pointed through the hedge."

"They are a necessary evil," urged Mrs. Arnold.

"Like war!" exclaimed Regina.

"I don't think Shakspeare properly appreciated the horrors of law," said Mr. Brand.

"They had not arrived at perfection in his day!" cried Regina.

"But are you really so much 'plagued?'" asked Mr. Brand, in a tone of interest.

"Infinitely!" said Regina.

"It does seem so very hard," remarked Mrs. Arnold, "that people cannot give up a bequest."

"I cannot believe in such a case," said Mr. Brand.

"Look at me, then, Mr. Brand," interposed Regina; "I suppose that seeing is believing."

"Then, Miss Howard, I am reduced to the necessity of not believing in your solicitor."

"I wish we knew where to turn," said Mrs. Arnold.

Mr. Brand hesitated.

"Help us, Mr. Brand," cried Regina; "I am sure you are thinking of some one."

"I was thinking that I should like to consult my brother," he said; "I may be partial, but he seems to me to have a clear head."

“And I leave you to judge the clearness of Mr. Reynard’s head,” interposed Regina, “when he has written at least eighty-three letters to grand-mama on this subject, and no two alike.”

“I really should be very grateful to you, Mr. Brand,” added Mrs. Arnold; “if we could see a chance of succeeding, it would do Regina more good than all the doctors in the world.”

“I must be going to town shortly,” remarked Mr. Brand—“I shall then be staying with my brother, and at least can hear what he thinks on the subject.”

“Oh! thank you, Mr. Brand!” cried Regina—“I am sure your brother must be clever! You don’t know how grateful I am!”

And as she met his eyes, fixed on her with a peculiar expression which she did not know how to interpret, but which she took for surprise at the implied compliment, she added hastily, speaking, as she always did, from the impulse of the moment—

“Why, do you think I am insensible to your acquirements, and indifferent to your beautiful

sermons, because I don't follow you all across the common, mewling like—well, grandmama—like a lady of our acquaintance? I *do* think that your brother is likely to be a superior man.”

“I cannot help it, Mrs. Arnold,” pleaded Mr. Brand; “I must laugh—I know who Miss Howard means; but I cannot tell her how much I value her good opinion.”

“But, after all, how is Miss Hopper?” inquired Regina; “has she recovered Mr. Morley’s *perversion*, I think she calls it? Or is Mr. Carter (aged eighty-two) appointed his successor?”

“Dear little Regina, are we not growing scandalous?” asked Mrs. Arnold. “Suppose you sing Mr. Brand that pretty little *Volkshied* by Mendelssohn.”

“Just what I was wishing for,” remarked Mr. Brand; “but I hardly ventured to ask it, after your grand London lessons.”

“I will sing to you all the more readily, for I hope I am improved,” she replied; “Garcia said so.”

Mr. Brand was quite of Garcia’s opinion.

As soon as he had taken his leave, Mrs. Arnold said to her grandchild—

“Now, my Regina, I know you will answer me with candour. Have you any reason to think that Mr. Brand is attached to you?”

“Not the least, granny,” cried Regina; “I cannot think what made people so silly—to be sure, Miss Hopper is silly to begin with—but really, people like Mrs. Ramsay to suppose that he had an idea of me! He never in his life said any thing grave, any thing earnest, to me. We have talked and laughed, as we do now, ever since he first came to Holmwood. It seems to me so very natural to like an intelligent person without loving them. That is what I feel towards him, and what I am sure he feels towards me.”

“Then I have no occasion to alter a little arrangement I have made,” said Mrs. Arnold, half to herself.

“About the school? no, granny. I have grown very charming of late; but I can meet Mr. Brand every Wednesday at the Bible class, without endangering his peace.”

Mrs. Arnold smiled, and kissed her.

"I am so glad you have written to Alban," continued Regina; "he can never now plead ignorance of our intentions; he may be indifferent, but he cannot mistake me. My pride is at rest now."

"I think, my love, we shall hear from him in reply; he can hardly avoid that."

"I anticipate so much from Mr. Brand's brother," said Regina. "I dare say it is all very simple, and that I can shake off Beyminstre 'like a dewdrop from a lion's mane,' when I get into honest hands!"

"My dearest, we know nothing against Mr. Reynard."

"Except his eyes, granny!"

"Silly child!"

"I am not on terms with Alban, granny, at present! No, no! But if he writes a very affectionate letter to you, perhaps I may think better of him."

"I should not wonder, little Regina."

"He certainly is very superior to the people in this neighbourhood?"

“I think so, my love.”

“His mother used to praise his temper very much.”

“It is not temper, my Regina, that I fear in him; the evil lies deeper than that—it is pride.”

“But I like pride, granny!”

“By that sin fell the angels, my child; you know the passage.”

“Yes, granny, but Wolsey was speaking of ambition.”

“Well, my quotation was unfortunate,” said the old lady, smiling; “but my Regina knows there is a higher authority than Wolsey, which condemns pride still more unsparingly.”

“And if he is so proud I can tell him one thing—that he will not bend *me*!” cried Regina; “and I should like to see how foolish he will look when I coolly hand over the property to him some fine day, and then as coolly wish him good-morning!”

“My little Regina will not do that,” said Mrs. Arnold, embracing her as they parted for the night; “she will think of her grandmama, and be very gentle.”

One morning, two or three days after this conversation, as Regina was dressing, she accidentally shook the missing ring out of a corner of her workbox, in which she was searching for a pair of scissors. Delighted at its recovery, she hurried from her room into Mrs. Arnold's to restore it to her at once. Her grandmother was not yet stirring, and she parted the curtains, surprised that she should be asleep at that hour, for she was remarkable as an early riser. A beautiful waxen image lay on the pillow—a breathless quiet image of eternal rest!

And Regina was alone in the world.

CHAPTER III.

It is an early October twilight. The organ is pealing softly in Mr. Winter's music-room, and the young voices of the school-children are chanting the *Te Deum*. The door of Regina's sitting-room is half open, and she reclines by the dim wood-fire listening, soothed by the religious strain.

It is three months since Mrs. Arnold's death, and she has been living ever since with the Winters. Good Mrs. Winter, who had never left her own house, except to go to church, for thirty years, took a post chaise (still procurable at Bradford), and was on her road to Holmwood within five minutes after she heard of the death of her revered old friend.

She remained with Regina the week before the funeral, doing every thing that the warmest heart in

the world could suggest for her comfort, and leaving every thing at Prior-street to go to wreck and ruin, as she firmly believed, without a sigh ; only occasionally disturbed by the passing thought of a ground rice pudding which Mr. Winter liked at his early tea, and which she was sure Charlotte could not superintend.

She had insisted on Regina occupying rooms at her house apart from the family, "till she could turn herself round," as she expressed herself ; and the poor girl thankfully availed herself of such a refuge. The very evening of the funeral Mrs. Winter took her home ; so that the next morning, when Mrs. Chillingworth and Mrs. Ramsay, both arrived at Holmwood with the same intention—to offer a home and a husband to the great heiress—they found the shutters still closed, and were informed by Becky that Miss Howard was gone to live with Mrs. Winter.

So that, after some rather high words exchanged between themselves, for both ladies had needy sons, they went away cross and disappointed.

And now Regina is leaning back in her chair,

dreamily gazing, through the open door of the music-room, at the wax lights on either side of the organ, and the gentle, earnest, old musician bending over the keys, and the clean fresh-coloured children standing in two lines (*soprani* and *alti*, Mr. Winter calls them), at his right and left hand, the bright short hair and uplifted faces of those nearest the light illumined with a halo, that fades away into shadow at the termination of the class.

But soon the deep throbbing notes of the organ were mingled with sounds not quite so harmonious ; and Mrs. Winter came puffing up the stairs, followed by a maid-servant bearing a lamp.

“ Mr. Brand come to wait upon you, my dear,” she said ; and turning to the stair-head, so that her remark might not be lost, added, “ and I hope he is not going to bother you about business, for a poor thing that can hardly eat a bit of dinner is not fit, I am sure, to be worried with a heap of law-papers.”

“ I promise you, Mrs. Winter,” said Mr. Brand, who was by this time acquainted with the strange old woman ; for Mrs. Arnold had appointed him

Miss Howard's guardian (to the property *she* had to leave), and this was not the first visit he had paid in Friar-street, "I promise you that I mean nothing of the kind: I am quite unprovided with law-papers."

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Brand," said Regina, half rising to greet him; "I have been wishing to ask if you have done any thing about that miserable Beyminstre estate."

"Are you stronger?" he asked, with a little tremor in his voice.

"Much; I am so kindly cared for here. Have you spoken to your brother?"

"Not yet, Miss Howard. It will be better that you should mention your wishes in the first place to Lord Oswestry: he is now your only guardian in reference to that property."

"True! yet it must be a matter of perfect indifference to him. I don't think I could find courage to write to him on the subject. Oh! I have not told you that I received a very polite letter from him yesterday, inviting me to pass the remainder of my minority under his roof. He

says, they are returning to England in a few weeks. Here it is; will you look at it?"

"Thank you—a very kind letter. I think you could not do better. It will be a good introduction into the kind of society with which you have a claim to associate; and I am rather glad of this upon other grounds."

"You make me curious."

"I am constantly assailed by Mrs. Chillingworth and Mrs. Ramsay for permitting you to reside with these good Winters."

"But why, Mr. Brand?"

"Mrs. Chillingworth urges her connection with your family as an unanswerable reason for your spending your minority with her."

"She never thought of that before," interposed Regina.

"And therefore it is very natural that you should not think of it now," Mr. Brand remarked.

"And Mrs. Ramsay, who is *not* related to me?"

"She pleads the importance of your being removed from a family in which—you must pardon me, Miss Howard——"

“ To be sure—well ? ”

“ In which, she says, you have something of an undesirable engagement with one of the sons.”

“ Well—I think I do recollect Winny Hopper saying that I was partial to Mr. Richard Winter,” she remarked carelessly.

Mr. Brand saw that she did not even think the report worth contradicting, and he went on.

“ Both these ladies are very anxious to see you, and talk it over with you. They seemed to think that I had something to do with your seclusion, and told me that it was clearly my duty to allow your *real* well-wishers to come to the speech of you.”

“ Sometimes I wish that it was possible for me to respect the *understandings* of my fellow creatures a little more,” said Regina smiling; “ there is a stupid perversity about most of them that is very annoying. I am rather glad, though, that these are two married women. So many people seem to think that folly is peculiar to single blessedness. But I will see the dear ladies, Mr. Brand,” she added in a softened voice; “ I am growing more reasonable.

And my prospect of staying with the Oswestrys will put a stop to their entreaties."

"I should think so. Lord Oswestry has the best right to you at present—and he is a married man—*he* has a home to offer."

"Ah! Mr. Brand," cried Regina with something of her old archness; "if a certain desirable event were to take place; but even then, I don't quite think Winny Hopper would covet me for an inmate."

"I am so rejoiced to see you in better spirits," he said, as he rose to take leave, "that I do not know how to scold you for your malice."

Forewarned of the invasion of these attached ladies, Regina was not much surprised the next day to receive a visit from Mrs. Ramsay; but she certainly did not expect that Winny Hopper would accompany her friend.

"I was so very anxious to see you, Regina," cried Winny, as Mrs. Ramsay's large arms enfolded her slender sable figure, "I really could not wait any longer."

"Well, to be sure, my dear, this is a miserable

hole!" exclaimed Mrs. Ramsay, suffering Regina to glide back into her arm-chair; "I can offer you a somewhat larger apartment than this, or I'm sure I should not think of asking you to my house."

"That you can, indeed, dear Mrs. Ramsay!" echoed Winny.

"I am sure I can't think whatever induced you to come and bury yourself here," resumed Mrs. Ramsay.

"We know—don't we, Regina?" simpered Winny.

"Why, a little gaiety would have been the very thing for you—just what I may say, without vanity, I could have offered you: I suppose you heard that I called at your little cottage at Holmwood the day after you left?"

"To be sure she did," squeaked Winny; "and very grateful, I am certain, she felt."

"It is a change for you, certainly," announced Mrs. Ramsay, looking larger every minute; "why, I am hardly so important a person as you will be, Regina, when you come of age, though, to be sure (her velvet cloak swelling like a pouter pigeon),

I have the advantage of you, my dear, as a married woman ! We must try and get you a husband—a good husband, Regina.”

“Take the trouble off your hands, you know,” added Winny, blinking good-humouredly.

“You will be very much dazzled with your new possessions at first,” resumed Mrs. Ramsay ; “but we must try and break you in by degrees. And though I don’t pretend that Ramsay House is on the same scale as Beyminstre (a horrid stuccoed affair, that smells of stockbrokers a mile off, as the French have it)—Ramsay House is, it’s true, not so large, nor are our grounds so extensive, we don’t pretend it, and our entrance hall is not above twenty-two feet by sixteen, I should say; still we make up fourteen beds, and I believe my housekeeping is on a very liberal scale, and it will be new to you, my dear, to be waited on by three footmen in livery and a butler in plain clothes, and to ride out in my coach whenever you like.”

“Such a great advantage !” chimed Winny.

“You are very kind,” said Regina, “but——”

“Now, my dear, as a friend,” persisted Mrs.

Ramsay, "let me assure you that it is very important you should not remain *here*. You cannot, I am sure, with all your enormous advantages, mean to throw yourself away; I hope you will set yourself at a higher figure than that. Why, if my Julia had half your advantages (I speak of your property, my dear, because in point of beauty, you know, why, we are all as God made us), I declare I would not let her go under a nobleman—I would not, indeed!"

"Yes! and it would be hard upon poor Mr. Brand to be thrown aside merely because you have come into a great fortune, and see it bestowed on Mr. Richard—his inferior in every way!" Winny exclaimed, in so shrill a squeak that Regina thought she was going to cry about it.

She did not trust herself to reply to Miss Hopper, but turned to Mrs. Ramsay.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Ramsay, but I am going to spend the rest of my minority with Lord and Lady Oswestry.

"The Earl and Countess of Oswestry!" echoed Mrs. Ramsay, correcting Regina as to the rank of

the persons she mentioned; “why—oh! ah!—I’m sure, my dear, I’m very glad of it—an earl, to be sure! who would have thought that little Regina Howard would ever have come to this? It makes one think—doesn’t it, Miss Hopper? Well! all I can say is, my dear, I wish my Julia was in your shoes; and I hope you will speak a word for old friends at any time, if you can. But I know my lady’s very proud and uppish, and it’s not very easy to get acquainted with her.”

There was an intense purpose in Winny’s compressed but smiling lips, that told of an inward resolve to secure for herself one day that difficult *entrée*, of which the strong Mrs. Ramsay almost despaired.

Regina merely said it would give her pleasure if she could at any time serve Mrs. Ramsay.

However, the interview which she had rather dreaded was at an end. Mrs. Ramsay’s footmen, and coaches, and conservatories, all sank down before the noble name of Lord Oswestry. Mrs. Ramsay took a very affectionate leave of Regina, promising that, when she next came to Prior street,

she would be accompanied by Regina's old play-mate—her son James.

At this threat Regina ungratefully followed her down-stairs, and confided to Mrs. Winter that, if Mrs. Ramsay ever called on her with a companion of the worthier gender, she was decidedly to be not at home.

Mrs. Winter looked at her with an arch twinkle in her eye, and replied, "I should think so, my dear; you are not agoing to keep company with the like of her or her sons either. The whole lot are horrid low, you may depend of that, though Winter teaches the girls; and I can remember the time when old Joe Ramsay, the father, had not so much as—what's that, Charlotte? what does Richard want?"

And it was lucky for the consequence of the Ramsay family that one of her thousand household cares summoned her away in the very beginning of this interesting retrospect. For all pompous, pretending upstarts may take my word for it, if they will, that they have no more inveterate enemy than a sensible honest woman of the middle class,

who remembers them in humbler days, when perhaps they would have been glad of her notice, and whose very existence they cannot demean themselves to recollect. They little dream how she “ravels out their weaved up follies,” how she tells of their cousin the miller, the biggest rogue in the parish, and their uncle the haberdasher, who became bankrupt, and the brother-in-law, who went to the colonies at the king’s expense. And it is curious how this worthy woman, though she has the very best of hearts on any other subject, contrives to make these stories reach the very ears which the victim had sooner than a hundred pounds they never heard; how the squire’s lady, and the aristocratic rector, and the lord and lady Henry in the cottage *ornée*, are somehow or other made acquainted with these unpleasant particulars, through the same respectable channel.

“I have done with Mrs. Ramsay,” thought Regina, after the interview; “and now for Mrs. Chillingworth!”

But two days elapsed before that lady made her desired appearance; and then, to Regina’s

amazement, she also appeared followed by the unwearied Winny Hopper.

“Come to see how you are getting on, Regina!” began Winny; “could not keep away.”

“I am come to take you home with me, my dear love,” remarked Mrs. Chillingworth; “some of these good people, I dare say, will pack up your boxes, while we have a little chat together.”

This mode of attack seemed to Regina more impertinent than Mrs. Ramsay’s patronising advances; she replied quietly, unabashed by the light glaring eyes that were riveted on her face, that she had already made arrangements which prevented her from accepting Mrs. Chillingworth’s kind invitation. Winny seated, smirking with her arms crossed stiffly before her, screwed her eyes, and nodded provokingly to Regina.

“That plan won’t do at all, Regina,” she cried; “Lord Oswestry is such a bad, bad man!”

Mrs. Chillingworth waved Winny into silence by a fierce gesture, and echoed, “A bad man, indeed! A most improper person to be staying with!”

“He is married, I believe,” said Regina.

“Ah! poor Lady Oswestry!” squealed Winny.

“Poor Lady Oswestry!” repeated Mrs. Chillingworth. “No! Regina; *he* is not a person to whom I would intrust the daughter of a dear old friend! I could not answer to my own conscience to let you—a poor motherless girl—enter that house as an inmate.”

“All this affection comes too late,” thought Regina.

“Miss Hopper thinks with me, that Effington is the most natural and suitable home for you till you come of age, and far more cheerful than Piermont, with my young people; my girls to play and sing with, and Chatham and Collingwood—your old playmates—longing to have you back again.”

Regina had a very dim recollection one Christmas eve, in her grandfather's time, of Mr. Chatham Chillingworth, then an impertinent Eton boy, refusing to dance with her because she was “a parson's daughter,” and making his resolution, though addressed to his mother, quite audible to

her offended ears; of his brother, Mr. Collingwood, she had no remembrance whatever.

“I am sorry that you and Miss Hopper do not esteem Lord Oswestry, and grateful to you for your kind thought of me,” she replied; “but my plans are fixed with respect to my visit at Piermont. I have the cordial approbation of Mr Brand in my present scheme.”

“All I can say is, that I would not suffer a daughter of mine to stay at Piermont for a single week!” exclaimed Mrs. Chillingworth; “and I am ashamed of Mr. Brand for seconding such an idea. Miss Hopper will tell you fine stories of my lord. It is not as if he—I really can’t enter into particulars to a girl like you—but there have been sad stories in which young *ladies* bore their part.”

“Yes, indeed, Regina!” cried Winny, smiling as if it was the funniest thing in the world; “I was of course anxious to hear all about him, when I was told he was your guardian; and I wrote to a friend at Carlsbad, who was there when Lord Oswestry and his family were passing through.

And there was an English gentleman with two lovely daughters, and one of them, it was said—in fact, he is a very bad man! and my friend remarked, ‘That was quite Lord Oswestry—such tales were very common on his account.’”

“So that you see, my dear, Piermont can hardly be your home,” remarked Mrs. Chillingworth.

“I am certainly very perverse,” said Regina with a smile; “but I prefer Mr. Brand’s judgment to that of Miss Hopper! I always was, you know, very fond of Mr. Brand. And, as he seems to think that my morals will bear the contagion of Piermont for six or eight months, I am disposed to make the experiment.”

“Very well, Miss Howard!” exclaimed Mrs. Chillingworth, rising with dignity; “I have done what I believed to be a sacred duty in warning you, and offering you a home at Effington, such as I think suited to your rank. We are not without a position in the country; we have a tolerable circle of acquaintance—but you prefer the glaring and dissolute circle of Piermont—you are dazzled by a title, and I dare say will shortly marry a nobleman

as worthless as the earl; however I have done, good-morning!"

"I thank you very much for your kind advice," said Regina steadily; "and I regret that I have no chance of renewing my acquaintance with you and your family during my stay at Piermont, since you have so strong an objection to its society."

Regina could have hardly said any thing more cutting; for the zeal and perseverance with which Mrs. Chillingworth kept up something of an acquaintance with Lady Oswestry (who was bored by her) was very praiseworthy, and excellent in the mother of a family, and was perfectly transparent to all her acquaintance.

"Good-by, Regina!" quoth Winny. "I shall call and tell Mr. Brand what I have heard about Lord Oswestry, and then I dare say he will not allow you to go to Piermont.

"Meddling animal!" thought Regina, as Winny's short frock and long legs vanished through the door. "I wonder how she dares to interfere in my concerns! She knows how I despise her—it must be as a paltry means of

revenge that she tries to irritate me. I don't believe any thing against Lord Oswestry's character; Alban's cousin—Alban!" She paused, and sat musing over the fire. "No—I have done with Alban! To send no reply to that letter, the last my dear grandmother ever wrote. Not one line—not even the courtesy that every gentleman owes to a correspondent, to acknowledge the receipt of her letter. I could be patient with a great deal, but this is brutal. Well, I can forget, too! I am not a pining girl, to muse over an image that existed only in my own fancy! I can look the realities of life in the face. My best friend bade me take his conduct in this crisis as the test of his worth and his love. He has failed, and I must learn to live alone."

She opened her desk, and turned over the papers within. She had none of his letters—no little memorials hoarded of their brief intercourse; no flowers, no foolish scraps; their courtship had been too serious in her eyes for such pretty trifling. All that remained to her from that brief episode, were her sketch of Alban and the opal ring she

wore. She looked for the sketch and burned it, took off the ring and put it away in its morocco case, ready to give it back when an opportunity should occur: perhaps on that proud day to which she was ever looking forward, when she should restore Beyminstre to the right possessor, and stand acquitted, even in his eyes, of any mercenary thoughts. And so, having settled, as it were, with the past, she turned her face towards the future. Nothing soothed her like music after fatigue or excitement. It was not the hour for a class, and she wandered into the music-room, where she was always welcome, and where she still took lessons of Mr. Winter, which she continued to make as remunerative as the worthy old gentleman would permit. She found her master disengaged, and soon forgot her cares for the time in one of Mendelssohn's intricate pianoforte movements. While she was thus employed, the old man accompanying her on the violin with a purity of tone and expression worthy of Molique, she was not likely to be sensible of an unusual stir in the house, and the portly Mrs. Winter was at her

elbow, crying out her name repeatedly, before she could be recalled to passing events.

“My dear Winter, do stop that noise!” she called out; and the obedient musician paused, with his bow raised a few inches from the strings, ready to take up the strain again as soon as his good lady should have said her say. “There, my dear! what do you think of that?” she continued, presenting a card to Regina. “The Earl of Oswestry called to see *you*, and sitting in your very room at this minute! Keep a lord like him waiting!” she screamed, in reply to a very timid suggestion on the part of Mr. Winter, that his pupil might perhaps finish the little bit of slow movement she had just begun, “Well, I never!—I think the world is turned upside down, with a vengeance! Come along, my dear! and don’t *you* go on fiddling and making a noise, till his lordship is safe out of the house.”

Regina would very gladly have avoided seeing any fresh person that day; but business overrules these trifling objections, and she trembled at the idea of keeping so great a person waiting for an instant.

He came forward the moment she entered the room, and took her hand to lead her to a seat.

“Miss Howard, I am very glad at last to make your acquaintance,” he said.

As he stood close to her, looking straight down without bending in the least, with a sort of proud reserved smile, his resemblance to Alban struck her suddenly. She felt the blush and the hot tears rising, but she struggled for composure, sank down into the chair he offered, and for a few seconds they surveyed each other.

He was very tall and thin, of a light complexion, with pale blue eyes and high features. Some slight traces of smallpox gave an unpleasant pallor to his face: and he had very fine teeth, which his haughty constrained smile shewed now and then, but rarely: at other times he looked cold and absent, but always high bred.

Regina's beauty was her least charm. She never moved without falling into such elegant attitudes that a painter might have arrested her to sit for her picture in any one change of posture. She looked peculiarly graceful when seated; her

arms always composing themselves into a posture full of ease and softness.

She sat now a picture of quiet attention—her deep lids raised a little, the long black fringes hovering over her dark grey eyes, and the pink colour deepened on her delicate oval cheek.

The impression she made on Lord Oswestry was that she was very beautiful, but that there was an original charm in her manner and bearing which was more fascinating than beauty, and made her besides seem three or four years younger than she really was.

She had but one thought in reference to Lord Oswestry. How like he was to Alban! The familiar tone of his voice, when he began to speak again, made her heart bound.

He began by expressing his regret that Lady Oswestry was not able to accompany him; she was a bad sailor, the voyage had been rough, and she had not yet left her room, but she joined her entreaties to his own, that Miss Howard would pay them an early visit at Piermont, and extend it until she came of age; he concluded that she

would then desire to take possession of her own house at Beyminstre. A grave hint, that she might perhaps by that time have selected a companion for life, concluded this address.

Now, though Winny had that very morning warned Regina against this same person—though she had denounced him as a dragon fatal to the softer sex as the celebrated monster in Schiller's ballad—there was nothing in his look or manner to confirm these accusations. She felt quite at ease with him directly, he was so calm and plain-spoken.

"It is very kind in you and Lady Oswestry," she said, "and I accept very gratefully your offer of a home for the present. I only hope I shall not try your patience, for I shall be a minor eight months yet."

"I trust we may be able to keep you so long," he replied, "but I don't expect it; a great heiress (to say nothing of other attractions) is not likely to want opportunities for a change of residence; so that, when you tire of Piermont——"

Regina lifted her clear regard to his face—not

fluttered nor bashful at the allusion he had hazarded. "I don't mean to tire of Piermont," she said with a smile; "but, if I did, I should come back here."

"You have a nice, cheerful room," he said, looking round, "and quite in the gay world, I see; for I suppose this is the main street of Bradford."

Regina could not help contrasting this remark with the loud contempt that Mrs. Ramsay had expressed for her little apartment.

"It's very quiet and pleasant," she said, "and I often watch the people from the windows when the lamps are lit—the old street looks so pretty then; and the country people come in to do their evening shopping."

"You must have been very lonely," he said, looking on her compassionately.

"I wished to be alone," she replied.

"True!" he said, bending his head like Alban; comprehending her, but not expressing any emotion. "Well, I shall be able to introduce you to Beyminstre very shortly. It is only ten miles from Piermont. Do you ride?"

"I used to ride a Shetland pony when I was a little girl, but afterwards we had no horses."

"You must take it up again; and, if you should like the exercise," he added with a smile, "you are not likely to be without horses in future."

"No! I suppose I could keep a horse," said Regina gravely, thinking, as she always did, in reference to her future expenditure, of the fortune her grandmother had left her.

Lord Oswestry fairly laughed—a frank gentlemanly laugh that pleased Regina.

"Yes! I think you may manage a horse, or a dozen, if you like. But now, Miss Howard, on what day may we have the pleasure of expecting you at Piermont? I know that ladies don't 'get under weigh' quite so easily as gentlemen—shall we say this day week?"

"If you please; I am very soon got under weigh," she answered, smiling. "I have no farewell visits to make; only a few poor people to see at Holmwood. We lived so very quiet—we knew scarcely any one."

"I think you were acquainted, though, with a

connection of mine," he said—"a Mrs. Willingham?"

"Yes! we were very intimate with her—she was my dearest friend," said Regina, with a trembling voice.

"A charming person, was she not?"

"Most charming!"

"And her son, do you know any thing of him?"

"He came twice to Dykeham on a visit to his mother."

"I met him in Egypt, and we travelled together for some weeks."

"Did you? I have heard nothing about him since Mrs. Willingham's death."

Lord Oswestry rose to go, and held out his hand—a slender white hand, that again reminded her of Alban.

"Shall I send a servant over to escort you?" he asked.

"Oh, no! thank you; I am an experienced traveller, and I have a maid with me; besides, what is the distance? a mere nothing. Five-and-twenty miles!"

“Come, there is something you wish to say,” remarked Lord Oswestry, observing a little hesitation in Regina’s manner. “You must always remember that I am your guardian, and come to me in any difficulty.”

“Thank you!” said Regina blushing. “I was thinking only, that I am very rustic and uncivilized, and that if you will bespeak Lady Oswestry’s indulgence for me, I shall be very grateful to you.”

“When you *need* indulgence, Miss Howard,” he said kindly, “I shall be happy to exert my influence with Lady Oswestry. Good-by—till Wednesday.”

So Regina arranged her few worldly concerns before beginning her new career. She left the trusty Becky in care of her house at Holmwood, for she purposed returning to live there as soon as she was of age—and Becky was her almoner with two or three poor people, who had depended for years on Mrs. Arnold’s quiet bounty. She paid a farewell visit to Mrs. Ramsay, but she thought it safer not to go near Mrs. Chillingworth, as she was on the point of leaving for Piermont; neither did

she feel it necessary to embrace the tender Winny before she went.

And, on a cold drizzling November morning, she stepped into her brougham with a sinking heart and trembling nerves, like a timid home-bred girl starting for a fashionable finishing academy.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was almost dark when Regina arrived at Piermont; indeed, it had been hardly light all day. She had gone up to dress on her arrival, unwelcomed by the lady of the house, as the fashion is; and found a charming bed-room and dressing-room appropriated to her use. The bright fire in the low polished grate, and the little kettle singing merrily on its trivet before the bars, gave a cheerful air of home comfort to the room; and she lingered with her feet on the fender, until the tiny clock on the mantelpiece warned her that she must prepare for dinner. She was not harassed by any anxieties about her toilet. Though her gown was made at Bradford, she knew there could be nothing very reprehensible in a plain black crape dress, and she inherited that French

perception which prevented her wearing any thing that was not artistical, which after all is the great secret of the most successful *modistes*; and her beautiful long hair wound round her head, was the most becoming, and in those days the most singular, of coiffures. She felt very solitary as she went down the great staircase alone, and it was a comfort to her that, when the door opened, Lord Oswestry, who had been courteously on the watch for her, came forward directly to lead her to his lady, and introduced the young stranger very kindly to her notice.

Lady Oswestry was about thirty; with large white arms and shoulders, smooth as marble; blazing dark eyes, black hair, a straight nose, and a scarlet spot of colour upon her olive cheek. She quite startled Regina, turning her regal head as her husband spoke, and bowing in answer to the young lady's timid salutation.

Then she made room for her on the sofa close beside her, and asked if she was fond of dogs.

"Not very," Regina said.

Lady Oswestry had a little long-haired spaniel

behind her, nestling into her garnet velvet robe, another lay on the large cushion at the head of the couch, and a third was coiled up at the feet of his beautiful mistress.

“I’ve three children, I believe—yes, three: I lost one last autumn, and as many dogs: I like my dogs best! Isn’t this a beauty?”

Regina admired the little silky spaniel, half buried in the crimson damask cushion; and Lady Oswestry lifted it up in her handsome flexible hand, and then laid it back in its luxurious bed.

I call them, after the three daughters of Louis XV., Loque, Chiffe, and Graille—you recollect? This is Chiffe; Loque always gets behind me—you are not afraid of him?”

“No—I think I should grow very fond of such beautiful little things,” said Regina, stroking Loque’s silken, pendant ears.

“You are a great heiress, Miss Howard!” said Lady Oswestry, her scarlet lips parting with a gracious smile.

Regina looked up with a blush, and smiled in

answer; she was growing quite at ease, and looked round the large warm room, at once splendid and comfortable, with that sensation of enjoyment that is best experienced after a long and dreary journey. The room was only lit by two large branches on each side of the fireplace, each containing five lights, splendid with gilding and painted china: but the enormous fire, flashing and flickering in the brilliant steel fender, polished like glass, was sufficient to illuminate a larger apartment.

“Have you ever seen Beyminstre?” asked Lady Oswestry.

“No—never.”

“It is such a lovely place—quite in the Gothic style—we must drive over to see it the first fine day; you are so much envied, Miss Howard, you can’t think.”

“Am I? I’m not at all glad,” said Regina.

Lady Oswestry smiled, and then rising, with a soft indolence of manner, said slowly—“Now that we are acquainted with each other, I must make you known to the rest of the people. Mrs. Falconer, let me present Miss Howard to you:

that's Captain Falconer near the marble table—he is to take you in to dinner. Captain Falconer, come off my table, which you are going to upset, and let me introduce you to Miss Howard.”

Mrs. Falconer, large, bold, and handsome, swept Regina from head to foot with a supercilious glance of her large blue eyes; while Captain Falconer, who had begun to sit on the mosaic table for want of something else to do, turned a thin knavish face to Lady Oswestry, and came up as required.

A Baron and a Baroness Spitzbergen; a Lady Catherine and Mr. Griffin, were the next to whom she was made known; and then Lady Oswestry appealed to a gentleman by the name of Henry, who was quite at the other end of the room.

But “Henry” was talking with Lord Oswestry, and did not respond.

Lady Oswestry leaned on the back of a chair, and seemed meditating a second attack on this individual, when the door was thrown widely open, and Mr. and Mrs. Chillingworth, Mr. Chatham Chillingworth, Miss Chillingworth, and Miss

Hobhouse, were announced; and Regina had scarcely time for a smile of mingled surprise and contempt, before the respectable name of Miss Hobhouse was illustrated by the appearance of Winny Hopper, smirking, dancing, almost skipping with joy, as her patroness named her to Lady Oswestry and her lord.

Winny's costume deserves to be rescued from oblivion; it was such as never before figured in that saloon, and was almost too much for the polished gravity of Lord Oswestry, or the indolent good-breeding of his wife. She wore a thick flowered scarlet satin skirt—which had belonged to an old lady to whom her grandmother had been housekeeper—and a black velvet jacket with a long tail; a wreath of poppies garnished her plebeian hair, which was always rough, at the top of which she had pitched a small lace cap, tilted up, as her bonnets were tilted, till it threatened to slide over on her nose. Her frock was short as usual, and she had a strong pair of cotton stockings and prunella shoes on her feet.

“How d’ye do, Regina?” cried Winny, running

up the scale to an impossible height. "Left your friends the Winters quite well?"

For Winny, like other low persons, thought she was inflicting a death-wound upon Regina, by casting in her teeth her intimacy with people of so inferior a station.

"Quite well, thank you," said Regina coldly, and added to Lady Oswestry, who had taken a seat beside her on an ottoman, "Miss Hopper is inquiring after some old friends of my grandmama; people who were very kind to her and her father when they came to England in the Revolution. He is an organist, and teaches music."

"You must tell me all about that one day," said Lady Oswestry; "I think any thing concerning the emigrants is so interesting. Had Mrs. Arnold ever seen Marie Antoinette?"

"Oh, yes! often, when she was a child. And I have a miniature of the Queen, on Sèvres, which belonged to the old count, my great grandfather."

"Isn't she odd? Who is she?" asked Lady Oswestry, directing her glance towards Winny.

"Don't you know her, Lady Oswestry?"

“Oh yes, my dear! I’ve just made her acquaintance,” she replied, lowering her low voice; “that is to say, when I drove over to Mrs. Chillingworth’s yesterday, to ask them all here, she introduced this funny woman, and asked leave to bring her. She said I should find her a useful sort of body, and that she could give some good hints to my young governess, who is rather too young, but I took her because she sings so well.”

“Regina forgets her old friends now,” squeaked Winny, sidling up to the ottoman where she was.

“I never forget my *friends*, Miss Hopper, I’ve so few,” said Regina, quietly.

“You don’t ask after Mr. Brand, Regina,” cried Winny;—“sad flirt—sad flirt—dear Lady Oswestry!”

This was rather free and easy for a first visit; Lady Oswestry glanced at her without making a reply.

“Are you a flirt, Miss Howard? I’m so glad, it will amuse me infinitely; you will be at no loss for victims I promise you.”

“It is quite a discovery of Miss Hopper’s,”

said Regina smiling; "but she is rather famous for her discoveries. I dare say you have found out that she is a learned lady."

"She's an odious creeping thing, but so useful, Mrs. Chillingworth says," remarked Lady Oswestry, idly unfurling her fan; "she took the charity-school at Effington for a week when the mistress was ill, and she is to cover all the school-books at Piermont with canvass, and print the names on them. Lord Oswestry is anxious about our schools, which are in a wretched plight at present, and I'm sure *I* have no notion how to cover their books for them. It is all quite out of my way. Henry!" again she was unsuccessful.

"It is the Newmarket meeting they are so busy discussing," she remarked; "I want to introduce my cousin Lord Henry Montresor to you. My father had no son, and his father is now Marquis of Shields; Henry's eldest brother is married; such a sad thing for him, poor fellow!"

She bit her scarlet lip, and looked annoyed.

"It's odd how fond the men are of those detestable horses; they like them better than

their wives I warn you!" she added, with a forced laugh.

Regina could not help thinking of her ladyship's recent confession, "That she liked her dogs better than her children!" but she was prudent enough to be silent; and just then Lord Oswestry crossed over with Lord Henry, and presented him to her.

His appearance did not interest her in the least, though she had never seen any one so handsome or so showy. He had a brilliant complexion, fine features, and very rich coloured brown hair; his figure too was striking, and he dressed with great care. But he did think himself so very beautiful, there was such a self-sufficiency in his air, that to her taste he was thoroughly displeasing. He did not trouble her, however, with much of his notice; but having contracted his eyelids, to view her perfectly from head to foot, he bowed and went back to the gentlemen.

He was very poor and very extravagant. He gambled on the turf, to the great surprise and horror of his father, who was on the turf himself,

and spent thousands and tens of thousands on his stud; and then wrung his hands to think that his son, who had from childhood heard racing extolled as the loftiest aim of existence, should have contracted such a habit.

All his habits—which were permanent—were bad; all his emotions—which were transient—were good; so that he was a very promising young man to introduce to an heiress. And therefore Lady Oswestry had sent for him to spend some time at Piermont, before any one else had time to make an impression on Regina.

Dinner was announced, and they were just rising to go to the dining-room, when Lord Oswestry, who was making his way towards Lady Catherine Griffin, a fierce female with mustaches, turned short round, and held out his hand to greet a gentleman who now entered.

“Why, Alban, I had despaired of you!” he said.

And then a voice that Regina had not heard for years, and that thrilled through every pulse, replied, “Have I kept you waiting? I must try and make my peace with Lady Oswestry.”

“Alban! he was in England!—here! He had come to explain, to understand—at least to see her again; she could now justify herself, she could upbraid, forgive.”

And as Lord Oswestry led him by the arm towards the sofa, while he exchanged greetings with her ladyship she half rose up, trembling, blushing—a smile of exquisite happiness parting her lips, her hand half extended, for one wild moment feeling as if their hearts had never been estranged; and then, as his frigid and distant bow responded to hers, she saw that this interview was not of his seeking—that he was still implacable, and that it was her task to forget. Those hot choking tears, which almost blinded her for a moment, were forced back again, and she was as cold as himself.

“I have had the pleasure of meeting Sir Alban once or twice at Dykeham,” she said, not withdrawing her extended hand; and he could not refuse to touch her trembling fingers, in which he might have felt the pulses still beating.

“This is a day of cousins,” whispered Lady

Oswestry, bending over Regina till her perfumed black lace lappets touched her face; "I hope you like mine best."

But by this time Captain Falconer was at her side to lead her away, and the smile with which she replied, might be interpreted as her ladyship best liked. She happened to be on the same side of the table with Sir Alban, and therefore saw as little of him as if he had been dining at Cairo; and she seldom heard his voice, which the total silence of her own cavalier permitted her to do as often as it was audible. He was then talking German with the Baroness Spitzbergen (a Russian lady married to a Dane), whose French was quite unintelligible, and who did not speak a word of English; and Regina, though she read German a little, could not catch a word they said.

As for the Hon. Captain Falconer, he could hardly be expected to amuse Regina. They had not a thought, and, much more, an acquaintance, in common; and as to her fortune, though money was his god, yet he was a married man, and could not expect to get any of it.

She sometimes glanced at his hatchet face, and, though she did not know that his soul was on the turf and the hazard table, yet she thought, if she had not met him in such high society, he looked like a man in whose company it would be advisable to take care of your pocket, if you happened to have your purse about you.

The dinner passed too soon. Regina was in a tumult, she hardly knew whether of pleasure or of pain. To be under the same roof with Alban! She did not think it would ever have happened again! She could not define her emotions, and she had no time. She followed in the train of ladies to the drawing-room, and was very sensible of Lady Oswestry's kindness, taking her arm, and standing with her on the hearth-rug, and asking her little questions that put her on an easy footing with the other women.

Even Mrs. Falconer's insolent eyes unbent a little, and she vouchsafed to say that she hoped to see a good deal of Miss Howard, and to make her a bold horsewoman. Lord Oswestry had been consulting Adolphus that morning about a horse

for Miss Howard, and they had decided on such a pretty creature, as quiet as a lamb!

“How very kind of Lord Oswestry!” exclaimed Regina.

Lady Oswestry laughed, and touched Regina's bright hair with her forefinger; while the Baroness Spitzbergen, a fat wax doll, who clearly ought to have been in the kitchen, had a proper understanding subsisted between nature and fortune, told Regina in French, that sounded to her like Kamschatskan, that she would look very well “*en Amazone*,” and not break the back of her horse, which the baroness said had been her own misfortune more than once.

Poor Mrs. Chillingworth and her daughter felt at once that Regina was out of their sphere; that she was a person of importance at Piermont, where they were only admitted on sufferance, as bores of country neighbours, whom it was quite necessary to invite sometimes, and have done with it. They were not even in the magic circle on the hearth-rug. Mrs. Chillingworth was trying to talk with Lady Catherine—a hopeless effort; and

Miss Chillingworth was hiding her yawns over a costly book of engravings. And as they were thus grouped, Lady Oswestry, having drawn Regina's arm through hers, a little hand stole between them on the soft folds of her ladyship's dress, and a little voice said "Mama!"

"It's my plague of a boy!" said Lady Oswestry, turning round; "why are you not in bed all of you? Make your bow to Miss Howard, Exmoor, and call your sisters."

Lord Exmoor, a thin sensitive child with a pale face, obeyed his mother, and then stood looking earnestly at Regina.

Lady Violet, beautiful and haughty, answered her brother's summons, and greeted Regina like a grown woman; Lady Clara, fair and *espiègle*, who was enjoying a game at romps with the good-natured baroness, in which any language was superfluous, would not come.

Violet, the eldest child, was ten; the boy not yet nine; the youngest girl only just six years old.

"I am so fond of children! I hope you will let me

see a great deal of yours, Lady Oswestry!" exclaimed Regina.

"As much as you like," laughed her ladyship.

"Come and talk to me," said Regina, taking a low chair, and drawing Lord Exmoor to her.

"Where do you come from?" he asked, looking earnestly at her.

"From Bradford."

"What is Bradford?"

"A little town—not the great Bradford in Yorkshire—but a little town here in Kent."

"What are the people like?"

"Just like every one else, to look at," replied Regina laughing.

"You are not like every one else," said the child, seriously.

"No two people are quite alike, if you look at them closely," observed Regina.

"I have remarked that," replied the boy.

Regina was interested by the strange intelligence of his look, the more so, that she really did not venture to speak to the proud Lady Violet.

He stood in silence for a minute, and then said softly, gliding his hand down it as he spoke, "White arm—white arm!"

She laughed, and pressed him to her side.

"Do you go to school?" she asked.

"Not yet—not till I go to Eton next year."

"Don't let him trouble you, Miss Howard," said Lady Oswestry, as she was crossing the room.

"Do you love dogs?" asked the child.

"No!"

"Good!"

"Why do you ask? and why is it good?"

"Because then, perhaps, I shall not trouble you."

"I am sure you will not; we are going to be great friends."

"For life?" he asked seriously.

"For as long as you please—till you go to Eton, and grow ashamed to have a woman for a friend."

"Speak in earnest—your eyes are earnest," said the strange child, gazing at her.

“I am quite earnest—we will be friends as long as you like.”

“Miss Howard, do you sing?”

Regina started and blushed. Lord Oswestry was leaning over the back of her chair. At first she had thought it was Alban.

“Yes; but not well enough to exhibit,” she replied.

“Will you let me judge of that?”

“Oh—directly.”

The sound of a piano now came through the half-closed folding-doors at the end of the drawing-room. Lord Oswestry led her in that direction.

“Tell me if you like that voice,” he said.

There were but two persons in the music-room, a very lovely girl at the piano, and Lord Henry turning over the loose sheets of music lying on the desk.

A voice the most exquisite, the most deliciously sweet that can be imagined, poured out gently, without effort or affectation a simple English ballad.

But, though enchanted with the songstress,

Regina's thoughts were busied in trying to recall that delicate face to her memory. Those blue eyes, so intense in their colour that they seemed to suffuse the lids with their own tint; that very light brown hair, steeped in gold; that skin so soft, yet of an opaque quality, on which the blush was of a scarlet tinge, as it now rose fast over face and neck as Lord Henry bent lower and whispered his praises of her song—yes, it flashed upon her all at once, it was Edith Carleton, with whom she had sung at the concert at Bradford!

The young lady had now risen from the piano, and, seeing Regina, stood timidly waiting to be recognised. “Do you know me? Do you recollect Regina?” she exclaimed, hurrying towards Miss Carleton and clasping both her hands: “what a pleasure to meet you after this long time!”

“It is indeed, dear Miss Howard,” said Edith, looking confused yet happy.

“I did not know, Lord Oswestry, that Miss Carleton was staying with you!” exclaimed Regina.

“Let me show you the cameo that Lady

Oswestry was speaking of at dinner," he said, leading her to a cabinet at the other end of the room.

"Beautiful; Canova's night!" cried Regina.

"Miss Carleton is governess to our children"—he remarked in a low tone.

"Is she? then she is staying here always. That is very pleasant for me—I met her a long time ago—and took a great fancy to her."

"Ah—but the governess—you see you can't be intimate—you must avoid that, Lady Oswestry will tell you so."

"Why?" asked Regina.

"In the first place, her time is very much occupied with teaching."

"Oh, you may be assured, Lord Oswestry, I will not infringe on her hours of study," said Regina.

"No; but, independent of that, it would not do for you. Lady Oswestry will explain it all to you—your circle of acquaintance is not yet fixed now; if you were to cultivate Lady Catherine."

"What! that dry spidery woman?"

Lord Oswestry laughed.

“ You see, Lord Oswestry, what a Vandal I am—I am quite ashamed of myself—for the lady might be related to you for any thing I could tell.”

“ There’s no connection between us, on my word,” he said, still laughing; “ and pray, don’t think I wish to exclude you from the governess; only that any marked attention to her—however, my lady will explain all that to you—and I wish you to do as you like in every thing.”

“ Thank you!” cried Regina, and with the speed of an arrow she was at the piano again, where Edith was singing another song.

“ But you are not to escape me,” said Lord Oswestry as he joined her; “ you are going to sing now.”

Regina sang a little Spanish air that delighted Lord Oswestry—Lord Henry had lounged away from the piano during her performance; but Mr. Chatham Chillingworth replaced him, and complimented Regina till she was quite weary.

And, before she entirely lost patience, Lady Oswestry glided up to her, and whispered that, if

she was tired with the bustle of moving, which she knew by experience was a horrid business, she had better steal off and go to bed ; and, as she gratefully followed this advice, she caught a glimpse through the folding-doors of Alban playing at chess with Winny Hopper.

CHAPTER V.

PUNCTUALLY at eight o'clock Regina's maid appeared at her bedside with a cup of fragrant coffee, and an intimation that breakfast was ready always at ten. She had not been able to go to sleep till very late, after all her excitement, and she was in a profound slumber when the entrance of Mrs. Flimsey dispelled her morning dream. Alban and Winny were dancing the Polka at railway speed, and Regina was trying to creep out of sight behind the window curtain, conscious that she was attired in an under petticoat and only one shoe. She sat up, thankful to be released from such an uncomfortable position, and sipped her coffee while Mrs. Flimsey laid out the things for her toilet.

It would be out of nature for a lady's maid not

to gossip, and Mrs. Flimsey had so much to tell, she hardly knew where to begin. There was a great deal to say about the magnificence of Piermont—about the sideboard of plate, which, through the condescension of the maître d'hôtel, Mrs. Flimsey had been permitted to gaze upon, till her eyes fairly ached with the blaze of gold and silver salvers, and goblets, and cups.

“And speaking of cups, mem,” said Flimsey, as she brushed Regina’s long tresses, “there was two, mem, that I think must have arrested your attention, being that I could not any ways make out how they came to be cups at all. One was two Turks sitting under a palm-tree; leastways one of them was in chain-armour, and the other in a turbin—and the corresponding antagonist (by which expression Mrs. Flimsey alluded to the pendant) consisted of a shaggy sort of man kneeling on a stag, with two dogs behind him, and a knife in his hand.”

These two racing-cups, which certainly bore no affinity to drinking vessels, Regina confessed she had not observed.

“And then, mem, the liberal way in which every thing is conducted all over the house—even the governess has a fire in her bedroom, and a footman to answer the study bell.”

“The governess is an old friend of mine, Flimsey.”

“Is she, indeed, mem? Well, and the housekeeper is a clergyman’s daughter, and sits in a room by herself, not even mixing with the maître d’hôtel, nor my lord’s valet, who is quite the gentleman, and can’t abide foreigners—he says, he has seen too much of them.”

“I am half a foreigner, Flimsey.”

“Indeed, mem?—I am sure Mr. Edmonds had no *idea* of that. Great excitement has prevailed respecting your arrival, mem—and he says it is well known that you can write yourself ‘her ladyship’ any day that you please.”

Under what form of correspondence Regina was likely to write herself “her ladyship,” she did not pause to inquire—she took her gloves and handkerchief and hastened into the breakfast room, which in that house was also the library,

and where the guests were already beginning to assemble.

The gentlemen were dressed for hunting, and three or four who had ridden over to breakfast with Lord Oswestry, before starting for the meet, were lounging round the large fireplace, talking and laughing rather noisily.

Mrs. Chillingworth and her daughter were there, looking rather forlorn ; Winny, perched sideways on her chair, was smiling joyfully at the men, and looking as if she was quite ready to begin the polka of Regina's dream with any one of them.

Lady Catherine, stiff and upright as if she had never gone to bed, was reading the *Times* at the full stretch of her arms, occasionally declaiming bits of the leading article to her host, with her own remarks appended—as, “ striking observation; this,—my lord,—I quite agree with him there ; I always thought Austria deficient in that respect. —Do you think this calculation to be relied on ? ”

Baron Spitzbergen, ugly, and by no means clean to look at, and who, report said, remained smoking in bed till three minutes before he thought fit to

descend to breakfast, was glancing through a handful of thin sheets of paper, which were evidently foreign letters.

Lord Oswestry, glad to get from under Lady Catherine's fire, came to meet Regina, and placed her in a delightful reading chair, at the chimney corner. "Do you find Piermont cold?" he asked. "Lady Oswestry always complains of the exposed situation."

"Piermont is not cold!" Lady Catherine asserted behind her paper.

Lord Oswestry smiled, and Regina, catching his eye, smiled too.

"I think the house is delightfully warmed," she said—"and it did not seem to me to stand high as I approached it yesterday. Oh! I see—from that window the ground falls suddenly; what a lovely view! Are those cedars? and beyond, lower down, is there a river?"

He went with her to the window, and pointed out the different objects to her notice; and while thus engaged Lord Henry came in with Sir Alban, and a general good-morning was exchanged; and

then Lady Oswestry made her appearance, and hoped nobody had waited, and wished that Le Fevre had made the tea, and called Regina to sit by her, and signed Lord Henry into the next chair, all with her usual indolent grace, diffusing a perfume of magnolia wherever she moved, and dazzling Regina with her beauty and her splendid toilet.

Regina was equally an object of attention to the gentlemen; it was satisfactory to find that the heiress was lovely, with an exquisite figure, and a timid manner, which gave them the impression that she was rather soft, and therefore easy to win. The women were disposed to her, because she avoided the notice of the men, and was little likely—her wealth set aside—to obtain it, with that pure spiritual gaze, and unflattering indifference to their admiration.

“Would you like to drive to the meet this morning, Miss Howard?” asked Lady Oswestry, leaning a little aside to allow the servant behind her to pour out the tea almost over her shoulder.

“I should like it some day when you are going, Lady Oswestry.”

“Oh! my dear, don’t wait for that! The whole of the present company excepted, I think hunting-men the most uninteresting set of beings, and my object would be to put as many miles between us as possible, instead of spurring after the dear creatures before the sun is well risen.”

“It is not the hunters I want to see,” said Regina, lowering her voice so as not to offend the red coat on the other side of her; “but I should like for once to see a pack of hounds—such a thing has never come in my way.”

“It is the best part of the shew, certainly,” replied her ladyship, glancing contemptuously down the table. “Henry, did you hear that Miss Howard had never seen a pack of hounds?”

“Really!” he answered, hardly pausing in his indefatigable exertions, devouring a breakfast fit for a ploughman.

“Will you drive with Lady Catherine to Crackskull Common, or wherever it is?” asked Lady Oswestry; “and my dear,” she added ironically,

handing Regina a printed card that lay on the table, "whenever you chance to have a headache—there is a list of the hunting days that may be depended on—I advise you on those occasions to breakfast in your own room if your nerves are not made of cast-iron."

Regina could not help laughing at this suggestion; for twenty or more people, when the greater number are men, do not breakfast together without some little noise; jokes, laughter, discussions, carving, moving chairs and plates, all tend rather to disturb that perfect quietude which Lady Oswestry preferred.

"Well, Miss Howard, what are you going to do?" asked Lord Oswestry, approaching her after breakfast.

"I am going to ask Lady Oswestry when I can see the children; perhaps I may walk with them."

"Is that the way you begin to form your society?" he asked with a smile.

"If you please," she returned.

"My children will be much flattered," he said;

“but the rest of the company will complain of your desertion.”

Two of the gentlemen now reminded Lord Oswestry that he had promised to present them to his ward.

They were a Sir John Lawler and a Mr. Poole; both single men.

Sir John asked Regina if she rode, to which she replied, “Not yet;” and Mr. Poole hazarded a conjecture that the fog was clearing off, which she thought was possible; and then Lady Oswestry looked round among the group of ladies gathered about her, and invited them, if they were of a literary turn, to help themselves to books before they left the room; and she advised them to make haste if they did not happen to like tobacco, for she caught a glimpse of more than one cigar case; “and these charming heroes of the present century,” she added, taking Regina’s arm, “are quite equal to lighting them before we are out of reach of the poisonous smell.”

A britschka was at the door for such of the ladies as chose to drive to the meet; and Lady

Oswestry drew Regina into one of the great hall windows, to see the people off, as she said.

Lady Catherine passed them in a strong bonnet and rough hairy coat, and Mrs. Falconer, in a beautiful toilet, looking all the handsomer from the contrast to her strong-minded companion. Then the baroness came down buried in furs, and Miss Chillingworth, looking very cold; because she thought it unbecoming to be wrapped up too much.

"I wish them joy, don't you?" said Lady Oswestry, pressing Regina's arm; "how pretty they will all look in an hour's time, when the fog has fairly seized their noses, and their cheeks are streaked with blue like a soap-ball! There's Sir Alban, I want to speak to him."

Her ladyship rapped against the window pane with her pointed fingers; Sir Alban, who was just passing, rode up close and raised his hat.

"Where's Mootie?" she asked, putting her coral lips close to the glass; "you promised to bring her when you came."

"She arrives to-day, Lady Oswestry; she will be much flattered by your kind remembrance."

“We were such good friends at Cairo.”

“You were very kind to her indeed.”

“Do you remember the slice of water melon I used to give her every day at luncheon, and my lord fancying it would disagree with her?”

“I can assure you *she* remembered it long after you left, and used to shake her head very reproachfully at me whenever I offered her a bit of bread, which she had liked so much before.”

“And Tuny?”

“Oh! I brought Tuny as well. I meant to have sold him, but when it came to the point I could not make up my mind to it, and you see we were in Egypt, half way home.”

“And then you must not forget, that when you go back, we will take care of them for you, if it should not be altogether convenient to you to travel with them.”

Regina felt her heart stop, and then struggle to go on—a new sensation to her. Why should he go back? She could not bear the idea of his going again to India, when, as she hoped, all would so soon be settled; if he would only wait till

next June, she hoped it would be over, and he would be master of Beyminstre. She would speak to Lord Oswestry as soon as ever she could, as soon as she knew him a little better; or she would write to Mr. Brand; she must be doing something. And who was Tuny? and, above all, who was Mootee?

Standing a little behind her hostess, she could observe Sir Alban more at leisure than she had hitherto done. He appeared to have recovered his health, but was looking older and darker than she remembered him—perhaps a little harder. Time had sharpened his features, as it does in the case of all persons who think; and she could not but allow, with perhaps a little pride at her early selection, that not one of the gentlemen present could approach him in grace of manner, or in a certain calm and intelligent dignity of bearing.

“Yes,” he replied to her ladyship’s last remark, “Lord Oswestry, with his usual kindness, told me that Piermont should be Mootee’s home if I left her behind; and I should consent the more

readily, as I hope that she might be of some use to your ladyship."

"That lovely Mootee!" she answered, rubbing the pane with her handkerchief, made misty by her breath; "she would be useful to me for a pet; I should soon love her better than Chiffe, or even Loque; I'm tired of Graille, and, if I knew any one who wanted a dog, I do think I would give him away. Oh! they are moving at last! Does not Henry look handsome?"

This remark was addressed to Regina, just as Sir Alban raised his hat to the ladies in the window, before riding off. He bowed slightly, Lady Oswestry kissed her hand.

"He is a fine rider!" she said, glancing after Sir Alban, "and so is Lord Oswestry, it runs in families. But Henry admires you so much, you can't think. Now let us go into the drawing-room."

There was Winny, with a card and pencil, which she held up high before Lady Oswestry.

"I think, Lady Oswestry, if you will look over this little list!" she squealed.

Lady Oswestry could hardly control her countenance at the sound of Winny's voice. "Oh, Miss Hopper! I trust entirely to your experience," she said. "I dare say you will be so very kind as to go down to the school and settle it with Mrs. Pearson; I am utterly ignorant of these things, and too old, I'm afraid, to reform."

"But if you will have the kindness," persisted Winny, pursuing Lady Oswestry with her card and pencil, which she plunged at her like a spear—"if you will have the great kindness to cast your eyes over this, you will see that we want desks and other items."

Lady Oswestry took the card, to serve (as she afterwards told Regina) as a buckler against the thrusts of the pencil; while Winny followed up her advantage, by sitting down close beside her on the sofa, and talking her almost to death; varying the monotony of her discourse, by darting her flat forefinger at the little spaniels, and calling out in her shrillest tone, "Doggie! doggie! doggie!"

Meanwhile, Mrs. Chillingworth swept up to Regina.

“I am very glad, my dear, to meet you here,” she whispered, “and trust it will be of permanent advantage to you. With regard to that little affair that I mentioned to you (in the strictest confidence, my love), I am happy to inform you, that I am *convinced*, and so is Miss Hopper, that it was *all* a *scandalous* report, without truth or foundation. And therefore, my dear, here we are, and hope to be here often; and when we have the pleasure of seeing the Oswestrys at Effington, I trust that we shall be able to make a visit there, agreeable to *you* also.”

Times were changed to be sure. Regina bowed her thanks.

“When may I see the children?” she asked Lady Oswestry soon after.

“My dear, at all times and seasons. Oh! never mind their lessons; they are a mere farce at their age. Violet will soon have masters, and Exmoor will go to school, and I don’t care the least whether they ever learn to read and write. I had no end of education, and I don’t know what it has ever done for me.”

“Which way?” began Regina.

“Oh! I will introduce you; make you free of the school-room.”

“Me, too, dear Lady Oswestry!” cried Winny, jumping up.

“Oh! Miss Hopper, if you would kindly write down those excellent remarks, that I might shew them to my lord—for my memory is very bad—all of them, if you will be so *very* kind! There!” she exclaimed with the glee of a girl as they fled together into the hall; “I thought I should *never* get away from that awful list—what a woman! But I suppose we shall be rid of her to-morrow; she *must* go with the Chillingworths, don’t you think?”

“Of course, Lady Oswestry; unless you ask her to stay.”

“*I*, my love? I give you my word I would sooner have all the Chillingworths—but they are your friends, are they not?”

“Indeed, Lady Oswestry, they treated me with the most studied neglect until very lately.”

“I understand. Oh! people are all alike, my

dear, with some rare exceptions. This door you will recollect; the last in the gallery. There, Miss Carleton, I have brought you an old acquaintance. Violet, my dear, what an attitude!"

Lady Oswestry was gone, and Edith came forward timidly.

"This is very kind of you, Miss Howard."

"Regina, if you please, Edith."

"May I?"

"If you wish for my company in this room."

"Dear Regina, how much I shall enjoy it!"

"You are come to see me, too?" asked Lord Exmoor.

Lady Clara jumped on Regina's knees.

"I am come to see you all. Have you done your lessons?"

"Not quite," said Lady Clara; "finish my sum for me."

"Let me see it—what a little one—four and five make nine, I should say."

"No, seven—seven!" said the spoiled child, hanging round Regina's neck.

"I have put nine, and now it is right. And what is Exmoor about?"

"My dear Edith, he is reading Gil Blas."

"You naughty boy ; where did you find it?"

"On the top shelf," he said quietly.

"It is not a nice book," said Regina.

"Is it not?" he asked ; "have you read it?"

"I have; that is why I know it is not fit for you."

"Then I will not read it ; but you must tell me a story instead."

"We are going out walking now, in the park," suggested Miss Carleton.

"And I am coming with you," said Regina.

"Let me walk with you!" cried Lord Exmoor.

"And you can tell us the story as we go," said Lady Clara.

Lady Violet politely apologized for her brother and sister ; she feared they were very troublesome.

"Not to me, because I am fond of children," she said. "Now, Exmoor, you must take me the prettiest walk ; it is all strange to me, you know."

They all went into the park, the two younger

children with their hoops, Lady Violet walking stately by the side of Miss Carleton.

The first thing they did was to quarrel. Lord Exmoor wanted to take Regina across the new bridge to the pheasantry; Lady Clara stoutly maintained that it was a great deal prettier in the upper park—the way to the steward's cottage. From words they came to blows in a minute. The little waxen Clara, with her sky-blue eyes glancing through her golden curls, beat her brother on the head with her thick hoop stick as hard as ever she could, and he threw his hoop over her, and dragged her along the walk so fast, that at last she fell down on the gravel and scratched her knees. Then shrieks and vociferations on both sides filled the air. Poor Miss Carleton turned helplessly from one to the other; she was too gentle, and too unused to children, to have the least control over them.

“Pray, be quiet! pray, don't quarrel!” she implored.

Regina snatched up Clara, and tried to soothe her, and, after a little coaxing, the young lady left

off crying, and even condescended, at Miss Howard's request, to be reconciled to her brother. Then, without again referring to the disputed point, she walked on with Miss Carleton, as chance directed, along the side of a plantation that skirted the park palings.

"This is a nice walk; so dry and sheltered," she remarked to Lady Violet, as the others ran on before them.

"Yes; this is my cousin Henry's favourite walk," said Violet. "I dare say we shall meet him on his return from hunting. He often leaves his horse at the upper lodge, and walks to the house through this plantation."

Regina hastily turned to Miss Carleton, intending to ask her to diverge into some other path. She had taken a dislike to Lord Henry, and thought that, with his conceit, he might fancy they had walked that way in the hope of meeting him.

Edith's face was crimson.

Regina considerably looked away; but she said to herself—"I hope my poor little friend is not

falling in love with that odious red-faced man, just because he pays her a few compliments, and sometimes meets her out walking." But she could not help feeling a little uneasy.

While she was dressing for dinner, Lady Oswestry came into her room.

"My dear!" she exclaimed, "she stays! That crawling creature stays!"

"Miss Hopper! my dear Lady Oswestry, how is that?"

"I wish I knew, my love; she got hold of my lord with her card, and ran him through, I suppose, with her pencil-case; but the end of it was, he came up to me and informed me that she had kindly consented to prolong her visit, in order that she might teach the schoolmistress to teach the girls to *mark*! do you know what that means?"

"Oh, yes! Lady Oswestry—I have taught girls myself to do it."

"Ah! then there *is* such a thing! I rather thought it was a hoax; however I said—'Very well, your majesty.' What a pretty sleeve that

is! and how well your dress fits! Made at Bradford? Oh! then it's your figure."

"Do you know, Lady Oswestry, I am lost in wonder; that woman gets all she wants. It is not many years ago that she was longing in vain to know Mrs. Chillingworth."

"Those brazen people always do, my dear; and every body knows, when a person gets *into* a house, it's a hard matter to get them *out* again. But how she dresses! and (for a pious woman) how she ogles! Well, now we will come down and hear all the thrilling particulars of the 'run.'"

Winny was in the thick of it. Perched on a chair in her tail-coat and gaudy skirt, in the very midst of the hunting men, five or six of whom had been asked to dinner, she was listening and questioning with great animation. They were talking of a famous leap that Sir Alban had taken, extolling it as if he had taken another Bhurtpore. Sir John Lawler came up to Lady Oswestry, who was seated with Regina, and tried to describe to her the situation and the risk of the achievement.

“I don’t understand, Sir John—I never do,” she said; “he went over a wall, and a brook, and a tree.”

“Not a tree, Lady Oswestry!”

“Well, he went over a number of things that he had much better have ridden away from; just like Lord Oswestry. And then, when he comes home on a stretcher—I am talking of you, Sir Alban—when you come home on a stretcher, and are laid up for six weeks with a broken collar-bone, I for one will not nurse you; will *you*, Miss Howard?”

Regina blushed and trembled.

“You will never hear the last of that leap, Alban,” said Lord Oswestry as he joined them.

“So it seems,” he replied.

“It bores you, doesn’t it?” said Lady Oswestry.

“They address their compliments to the wrong person,” he remarked; “it was Firebrand took the leap, not I.”

“Firebrand! that dreadful horse!” cried Lady Oswestry.

“The finest hunter in the country,” said her lord.

"You will ride Mootie, Lady Oswestry?" said Sir Alban; "she is as gentle as a lamb."

"Oh! his horses," thought Regina.

"Perhaps—I have almost given up riding. I want to shew you one of Henry's sketches in my album; you remember my Egyptian dress?"

Lady Oswestry moved to a table at some distance. Lord Oswestry took her place beside Regina.

"I have been wishing to speak to you, Miss Howard," he said, "ever since yesterday. I am anxious to learn that Sir Alban's coming here is not disagreeable to you."

"To me? surely not," she answered hurriedly, and she felt the colour rushing into her face; she hoped Lord Oswestry knew nothing of her former acquaintance with Alban. She almost feared to hear him speak again.

"I am apt to decide in characters, hastily perhaps," he said calmly; "and I have an idea that Miss Howard possesses great delicacy of feeling, and might, therefore, be annoyed at meeting a person who had been supposed heir to a pro-

perty to which she has, I am sure, worthily succeeded."

"If you did but know how miserable it has made me! I mean the bequest," faltered Regina.

"You see I have not misjudged you," he went on in the same quiet tone; "but I assure you I would not have asked my cousin to make Piermont his home while in England, as I have done, were it not that he entirely shares my opinions on this subject."

Regina was breathless; her colour flitting fast.

"He *had* expected to be Sir Herbert's heir—he believed it to be inevitable; but I confess it gave *me* no surprise to learn the disposition of his property. The wretched terms on which he stood with his brother—I believe you know the family history?"

Regina bowed.

"I felt convinced that if there could be found a loophole he would avail himself of it; and, before Sir Herbert's death, he dropped some hints that the great aim of his life had been long accomplished. We were intimate—and I knew his one

desire to be, that Beyminstre should never descend to his brother's heirs."

Regina tried to speak, but failed.

"I explained all this to Sir Alban when we met in Egypt; I pointed out to him that it was his own father who had robbed him of Beyminstre, by destroying the entail. After that, it became an indifferent question to whom it should fall. Had it not been left to you, it would have gone to enrich the county hospital."

"I wish it had," said Regina.

"At any rate, I hope you are convinced that Alban meets you without any sense of injury. He is a person for whom I feel the highest esteem. He has already distinguished himself; and will most likely rise high in his profession, which he would never have done had he succeeded to Beyminstre. I am half disposed to envy him, and, altogether, I am very glad that you should meet."

"How kind you are—how very kind—to take all this trouble to explain to me!" Regina began.

It crossed her mind that she should like to say

at once that she wished to get rid of Beyminstre ; but she was afraid—her manner was then too agitated—her voice shook so that she could hardly get through two sentences. She would tell him the very next time he touched upon the subject.

Sir John Lawler took Regina in to dinner, Lord Oswestry called to him to bring Miss Howard to his left hand.

“ This is always your place,” he said, “ and nobody is to be affronted : it is my business to look after you, to see that you want for nothing : it ought to be no sinecure to take care of the heiress of Beyminstre.”

Sir John Lawler thought so, too. He made up his mind to work hard for the situation. He talked, it was hard to say of what, without intermission. Lord Oswestry addressed her sometimes, and smiled at her look of weariness. She, in her turn, could not help smiling to see him striving to comprehend the French of the baroness, who sat on his right.

But through every thing she continued watch-

ing Sir Alban, who was sitting next to Winny, and who was engaged in what seemed a very interesting conversation. If it had not been for Sir John, who broke out with a bray just like one of his own hounds every time she wanted to listen, she thought she could have heard what they were talking about; but as it was, she caught nothing but Winny's eyes rolling like billiard-balls, and the name pretty frequently repeated, of "poor Mr. Brand!"

CHAPTER VI.

PEOPLE came and went at Piermont, and still the sprightly Winny stayed. So did the Falconers, who were always welcome guests with the Oswestrys; young, gay, and insolent, they were always ready to promote any scheme of pleasure, always ready to laugh at quiet worthy people, and sufficiently accomplished to be really useful in those shewy amusements to which the English even of the higher classes are very sparingly addicted. They were clever in charades, and tableaux; they rode and danced well; they both played billiards admirably; and a handsome woman at a billiard-table is a great attraction in a country-house; and then they were not too particular—Captain Falconer was willing at any time to gamble till he was up to his knees in cards—and his wife

would flirt to the extremest verge of what could be allowed in society, with any man who was of sufficient consequence to deserve her notice. Regina did not like them at all, though Mrs. Falconer was very civil to her, trying to make her as bad as she was herself; she did not like the fierce Lady Catherine and her sneering husband; she did not like Lord Henry with his vacant impertinent manners; nor the other men who came and went, whom she hardly knew by name, who tried to flatter her and make her talk. She used to get into a corner of an evening with Edith Carleton and the children, and try as much as possible to shrink out of every body's notice.

She might have hid herself, and her beauty and talent, very easily—there is not the least difficulty, I can assure any diffident young lady, in keeping in the shade; but she could not hide her fourteen thousand a year.

One evening she was playing at spellicans with Lord Exmoor, against Edith Carleton and Lady Clara. They had got to a round table quite at the other end of the room, and were laughing and

joking over the game as happy as possible, all children together.

Edith was looking beautiful, with her brilliant smooth skin like porcelain, and her golden curls dishevelled into long tendrils; and Regina no less so, her pearly teeth glancing as she laughed, and her large dewy eyes shining like stars between their long black fringes.

One by one, the gentlemen, as they came in from the dining-room, loitered up to the round table to find out what it was that made the heiress so merry; all except Lord Henry, who had dropped on Lady Oswestry's sofa all among the cushions, and Sir Alban who was pinioned by Mrs. Falconer as soon as he entered the room.

Lord Oswestry came up last.

"Are you not cold out here, Miss Howard?"

"Not at all, thank you; am I, Exmoor?" she said, putting her hand to the little boy's face.

"Quite warm; pray, papa, don't take Miss Howard away," said the child, holding her hand fast.

"You see, Miss Howard, you have made one

conquest already," he remarked, drawing a chair to the table.

"And one is quite enough for any reasonable creature," she replied.

"What is your game? Is it very difficult?" he asked.

Regina gave him her ivory hook.

"Fancy papa playing at spellicans!" cried Lady Clara, nestling against Miss Carleton.

"What are your stakes?" asked Captain Falconer.

"Oh! now there's no pleasure in going on—we will play another time," said Regina, pushing away the toys, and turning to Lord Oswestry—"one can't play in public."

"And you can't expect to be in private any more," he returned. "Wherever Miss Howard is——"

"There will the eagles be gathered together," she replied. "I don't quote irreverently—I mean what I say; eagles—birds of prey."

"But they are not *all* eagles, Miss Howard."

"All *birds* are not eagles, I know," she retorted;

“but all the birds I am ever likely to see about me are either eagles or vultures.”

“That’s the worst of a great fortune,” he replied, “especially to a woman.”

She longed to consult him then; but he was looking towards Sir Alban, and she felt too conscious to speak; she would beat about the bush a little.

“I know I am out of my place here,” she said; “it is your kindness and my lady’s that gives me shelter for the present. I shall always be grateful to you—at a distance; but, as soon as I am of age, I shall creep into humble life again.”

“And do you think that, with your fine fortune, you will be allowed to slip out of sight?”

“I do—when people are quite sure it is not to be had,” she said with a smile that he could not quite make out.

“Are we not to have any music?” asked Lady Oswestry. “Henry, I wish you would take Miss Howard to the piano; and beg Miss Carleton to give us that pretty air from the new opera; and,

Mrs. Falconer, how idle we all are ! I thought we were to get up that quintette some evening."

Lord Henry began to rouse himself slowly up from his cushions. Lord Oswestry gave Regina his arm.

"I think I may as well save him the trouble," he said.

"Thank you—I am so glad!" cried Regina.

He always looked charmed at her *naïveté*.

"What! don't you admire the irresistible Henry Montresor?" he asked with a smile.

"Not at all."

"Don't you think him handsome?"

"Oh, yes!—that forces itself on one's notice when a person has no other attraction."

He looked delighted, as men always do, when a woman abuses one of their own sex. Talk of the jealousy of a woman! If any young lady has a fancy to annoy a gentleman of her acquaintance, and has no personal topic at hand, let her pronounce a eulogium upon any living being of the worthier gender, say the Emperor of China, or Signor Lablache, or Marshal Radetsky—any

man that she has never seen, and cannot possibly care about, and she will have the pleasure of succeeding perfectly.

“Miss Howard is singular in every thing,” said Lord Oswestry, as he led her into the music-room; “singularly charming.”

His manner was so very calm that she was not embarrassed by the compliment.

“How good you are!” she said. “I am constantly shocked at my own sayings and doings; but you keep your promise, and excuse me.”

Her crape skirt caught against the pedals of Lady Oswestry’s harp, and as she paused while her companion disengaged it, she heard Lord Henry—who was opening the piano for Miss Carleton—whisper to her—

“Well, are you contented with me?”

And Edith, with an expression of the deepest gratitude in her innocent eyes, replied—“Oh! I am so thankful to you—words cannot express.”

And then she bent over her music, occupied in finding the song Lady Oswestry had been asking about.

Now, as Lord Henry had come to Piermont to marry Regina, his whole conduct might seem a little inconsistent, for he had not addressed half a dozen words to the heiress since she arrived; and the sort of understanding he seemed to have with Miss Carleton, quite convinced Miss Howard that she was not his object. If he did not mean to trifle with Edith, she could positively think rather well of him.

“One really should not judge any body harshly,” Regina thought, as Lord Henry sauntered back to his sofa in the drawing-room; “he is just the sort of man I should have suspected of wanting Beyminstre, and yet he is not a bit more civil to me than he is to Miss Hopper. Perhaps he is really attached to Edith—I should not wonder—I never saw such a lovely face! And such soft appealing manners! Yes, Edith, I am quite ready; is this to be our duet?”

“I do not know, Henry, what you are about,” said Lady Oswestry, when her cousin resumed his seat beside her; “time passes, and there are half a dozen men already hovering about her. Though

Sir Alban, to do him justice, seems to have no views in that quarter."

"If he had, I declare I would not stand in his way," said Lord Henry. "He has the best right to the place."

"The place?"

"Beyminstre."

"On my word, she is too good for you."

"I am quite aware of it."

"And your debts?"

"I forgot them; I forget every thing when I am near you."

"Nonsense!" said Lady Oswestry, looking down on her fan.

"You do well to remind me—they must be considered—but I have my plan."

"Is it included in your plan that you should turn the head of my foolish little governess?"

"What an idea! A little common civility; such as ought to be more generally paid to women in her class."

"When they are pretty, I suppose."

"I don't think her so very pretty. You know,

Violet, the style of beauty that alone can influence my feelings. *I do not change.*"

"How foolish you are!" said Lady Oswestry, the scarlet spot deepening on her cheek. "We have both grown old and wise since that time."

The duet was now finished, and as the book of the *Nozze di Figaro* was still on the desk, Lord Oswestry entreated Regina to sing the *Dove sono*, which she did so admirably as to delight him; and two or three gentlemen who were standing round the piano, and who did not know "*Dove sono*" from the Old Hundredth, were equally warm in their praises.

Regina glided out of the music-room, followed by Lord Exmoor, who never left her if he could help it, and she was soon kneeling on the hearth-rug, sticking paper quills from the alumet jars all over one of Lady Oswestry's black and tan spaniels.

"Look, Lady Oswestry! I've made such a capital porcupine," she cried; "look, Exmoor, before they fall out!"

Lady Oswestry came to look and laugh at the

transformation of Chiffe; and then, wishing to bring Lord Henry forward, she said, turning to him—

“That was a charming air Miss Howard sang last.”

“Miss Howard? really. I did not know she sang!” he replied, looking quite surprised.

“My dear Henry, I cannot compliment you on the acuteness of your ear. I suppose you don’t see the difference between Miss Howard’s voice and Miss Carleton’s. I say, Regina, Henry thought Miss Carleton did all that duet, ‘Sull’ aria,’ by herself. He did not even know you sang.”

“I dare say not—I never sang to *him*,” said Regina, replacing the quills which kept falling out of Chiffe’s silken coat, with such an unconcerned expression that Lord Henry, with all his vanity, could not believe it feigned.

It discomposed his plan a little. He had intended to pique Regina as a preliminary step, and he thought he was getting on admirably. But, if she was not to be piqued, he must really

be at the trouble of making love to her; and there is no doubt he felt himself very ill used by the discovery.

It sometimes crosses the minds of simple folks, that to be straightforward is much less fatiguing than to play the knave. Lord Henry was undoubtedly very fond of his ease—but perhaps, as he lay among the sofa cushions, he was not altogether free from care. There was Lady Oswestry, whom he had once loved; Edith Carleton, whom he loved now; and Regina Howard, whom he could not do without—all under the same roof, and it suited his purposes to keep fair with them all.

There are some men who would rather have taken an axe on their shoulder, and gone to the back-woods of America; but Lord Henry was not made of such coarse clay.

And, as if he had not enough women on his hands at once, the fair Winny now popped herself on a chair close to his head, and began to improve the occasion by asking him, while she looked sweetly down upon his handsome features, “What were his views?”

He opened his eyes wide at this address, and then, struck by the oddity of her dress and figure, he sat up, returned her *æillades* with interest, and replied,—

“ Oh! nothing but pencil sketches.”

“ Henry draws *so* well, Miss Hopper,” said Lady Oswestry, willing to punish him for the little scrap of attention she had seen him pay to the governess—“ you should get him to shew you his views in Wales.”

And, rather to her ladyship’s surprise, Lord Henry got up, drew a chair to the table, and in reply to Winny’s delighted exclamations, said, “ He should be very happy if Miss Hopper liked to look over his scrawls—he might be useful in explaining where any thing was too obscure, and mention what were meant for trees, and what were mountains.”

How she laughed, how her eyes twinkled, how she darted her forefinger with little jerks at every corner of the sketches. And then, after a short conversation about drawing, it was quite easy for her to bring back the discourse to her first intention, and ask Lord Henry what *were really* his views

upon Church subjects in these divided times. She hoped he was not a sad Tractarian—she had known instances, which she deeply mourned, of error indulged till it led the unhappy subject of it to the Papal see!

“On my word that’s not a bad move,” remarked Lord Henry, who was certainly not intended for a martyr, and who imagined Miss Hopper meant that somebody had been made Pope in consequence of his secession from Protestantism. “There are few things I should like better than to sit on the throne of St. Peter. If you have any interest, Miss Hopper, among the cardinals, I hope you will allow me to bespeak it for the next vacancy.”

“Naughty Lord Henry!” cried Winny, looking at him affectionately. “I don’t know what to say to you!”

Regina and Lady Oswestry were both in fits of laughter—their heads close together, and sheltered behind her ladyship’s gorgeous fan. Sir Alban laughed too, and went up to the table to look at the drawings.

“ These are capital!” he said. “ I have half a mind to try the pencil, but I have always fancied water-colour more expeditious. You get in the distance so quickly.”

“ But there’s the trouble,” returned Lord Henry; “ a box of colours is absolute luggage—and then you can’t do without water—besides the bore of rubbing your colours; now I can write off a sketch as I would a letter.”

“ Alban made some beautiful sketches in Egypt,” said Lord Oswestry, “ and I am quite of his mind about colour; even a good engraving hardly pleases me.”

“ I think colour more attractive than form,” said Lord Henry, “ and therefore I am not properly sensible of the charms of sculpture.”

“ I have no such penchant for colours,” said Sir Alban, “ and use them merely as expressing a landscape more readily than simple light and shade; it requires a master’s hand to make so much of black and white.”

“ And Miss Howard draws,” remarked Lady Oswestry.

“ Will you let me see your drawings ? ” asked Lord Henry.

“ I have none with me,” said Regina.

“ By the way, talking of drawings,” exclaimed Lord Henry, starting up, “ when are our next tableaux to come off ? ”

“ Why, next week we have a dreadfully dull party ; that would be a good opportunity, would it not, Mrs. Falconer ? ”

“ The very thing ; who is your party ? ”

“ Oh ! don’t ask. Some tenants of Lord Oswestry, who have taken Fairlight Hall—Scotch people. Mac—you need not laugh, Regina, it is really their name—Macgillicuddy ! And the Lawlers, Sir John and his mother, and that sort of people, you know.”

“ Just the thing to pass the evening ! ” cried Mrs. Falconer ; “ what shall we have ? ”

“ How I wish we had something new ! ” exclaimed Lady Oswestry.

“ We had tableaux last time,” said Lord Henry.

“ And charades when we were here in September,” remarked Mrs. Falconer.

“ And I do believe we have acted every proverb in the language !” said Lady Oswestry.

“ Why don’t you set them down to cards ?” suggested Captain Falconer.

“ Because,” said Lord Oswestry gravely, “ as you are so fond of proverbs, ‘ You may bring a horse to the water, but you can’t make him drink.’ Try to illustrate that saying, by proposing a whist table next Wednesday.”

“ Have you tried the tableaux charades, such as they play in Germany ?” asked Regina, timidly.

“ My dearest creature, I never heard of them,” cried Lady Oswestry ; “ tell me all about it !”

“ Simply that, instead of a dialogue, you have a picture to represent each syllable ; and the closing one illustrates the whole word.”

“ Ten thousand thanks ! What a treasure you are ! This is a novelty ! Henry, I am sure this is new. Lady Pentland has not got this kind of tableaux. Come, now, what word shall we have ?”

“ Miss Howard should be mistress of the revels,” said Lord Oswestry.

“ No, indeed !” said Regina ; “ I am quite

ignorant of these things. I never even saw a tableau; it was my German master who mentioned this amusement to me, as illustrative of the number of compound words in his language."

"I am wild to put it in practice," said Lady Oswestry; "but we must form a cominittee, and the rest are to know nothing about it. Sir Alban, I am sure you won't desert me?"

"I am at your service, Lady Oswestry, at any time, if you will promise not to put me in your tableaux. You may employ me in historical researches for your costumes, or in painting your scenes, or designing groups."

"We shall find you plenty to do," she replied; "and you, Regina, you *must* appear."

"I had rather not," she said in a low tone; "I know you will manage for me—and I cannot be wanted."

"Very well! I know now you have an idea; what word were you thinking of?"

"You must tell me if it could be represented," she replied, withdrawing a little from the circle as she spoke.

They stood together conversing in whispers. Winny screwed up her eyes, and sat watching them; and glancing every now and then at Sir Alban, who seemed to follow their movements with a look of grave inquietude.

"I am delighted with Miss Howard's idea," said Lord Oswestry after a few minutes. "Let me know who are the initiated, that I may not be indiscreet. The children will be wanted."

"I told you so," whispered Regina, bending over Lord Exmoor.

"It will be nothing unless you act with me," said the child.

"I hope you will make me of use, Lady Oswestry," cried Winny.

"You must ask Henry, Miss Hopper," said her ladyship; "there he is consulting with Miss Howard and my lord. For me, if they want me to play or sit, I do it; but the arrangements are troublesome, and I leave them to other people."

Lord Oswestry had just rung for a large portfolio stand to be brought from the library, and he was shewing some engravings to Miss Howard.

Lord Henry, leaning over her familiarly, whispered his criticisms into her ear. And it may be taken as a sign of very imperfect breeding, when a man (as Lord Henry always did) plunges from the rudest indifference to a freedom of address that can only be tolerated in a very near relation.

"I am come to help; you must find me a little part—I don't care how little!" cried Winny, capering and skirmishing round the portfolio.

Lord Henry stared at her, and began to laugh; Lord Oswestry said coolly, "You are very obliging, Miss Hopper."

But he did not know Winny. She had no warmth in her that could be chilled. She meant to be in the tableaux. It was not worth considering whether her host and hostess had other views.

"There's a figure at the side that would do for me," she said. "I won't take the centre of the group; but you will want accessories. I should not mind being an old woman."

"You can't be a *young* woman," muttered Lord Henry in an aside to Regina. She bent down her head laughing. When she looked up, Sir Alban

was standing close to her. He did not say any thing, but he supported the heavy leaf of the portfolio, which she had been holding up, and which Lord Henry, with his selfish want of gallantry, had not noticed. His hand almost touched hers, which she quietly withdrew without haste, as she thanked him for his assistance; and, upon Lord Henry addressing him about the costume of a print they were looking at, she relinquished her place, and returned to Lady Oswestry.

A day or two afterwards, she was coming downstairs when she met Lord Oswestry.

"I was looking for you, Miss Howard," he said; "I have something to tell you."

"Have you seen Lord Henry?" she asked. "All the groups are settled; only we are going to change the attitude in that frightful picture by Haydon."

"Oh! this is something infinitely more important than a tableau," he returned with mock solemnity.

"You can't interest me," she said laughing; "I have nothing to fear and nothing to hope, unless

you could find out that Beyminstre had disappeared from the face of the earth."

"You are a very remarkable young lady," said Lord Oswestry; "you must prepare, however, to be very much overcome—Sir John Lawler has just declared himself a suitor for your hand."

"Sir John Lawler? is that the one with red hair?"

"No, no! Lawler has black hair; you are thinking of Mr. Poole."

"Oh! Mr. Poole is the red-haired man. I knew it was one of them. It's your fault, Lord Oswestry; you introduced them both together, and I don't know them apart. No, thank you—of course; oh! I don't want to see his letter."

"Will you come into the billiard-room? You will not be able to go out this rainy morning."

"If you please; shall we find any one there?"

"Lord Henry and Miss Carleton, with the children."

Regina gave him a pained, unquiet look.

"Oh, I agree with you!" he said; "it is very unwise; nothing can be more so."

“And will you put an end to it?”

“My dear Miss Howard, I have nothing to do with the governess. Lady Oswestry manages her share of the domestic concerns, and I mine; and it is well understood that we don’t interfere with each other.”

Regina gave a little gesture of the head, which plainly said, “I shall not take things quite so coolly.”

“You will act a very kind part by that young person,” he said, “if you will convince her that his attentions will do her no credit. I should be sorry that any young lady, in whose welfare I felt an interest, should accept from Henry Montresor, addresses much more serious than those which he is likely to offer to a governess.”

Edith was at the billiard-table, trying to mediate between Clara and her brother, who were pelting each other with the balls.

“He began it.” “No, she did.” “No, I tell you, it was when you were standing at the window with cousin Henry.” “She scratched me first with a pin!” “I could not help that; you

seized my frock—I did not know the pin was there.”

Lord Henry stood laughing at them. Edith, with crimsoned cheeks, seemed to be quite borne down by the violence of her little pupils.

“This won’t do!” thought Regina; “and her pupils are fortunately above her control. The best plan for her will be, to look out directly for another situation.”

CHAPTER VII.

“I WONDER if any body here can tell me how long it takes a person to cover twenty-eight small testaments with canvass?” asked Lady Oswestry, looking round on the party assembled about the library-table the next morning, including all but Winny, who had walked down to the school, in a heavy fall of snow, immediately after breakfast.

Nobody seemed to have an idea.

“I merely want to know,” continued her ladyship, “because, as long as those twenty-eight testaments hold out, it is clear that Miss Hopper is a fixture. Now, she has been here ten days, and, though she may be useful, she is not exactly ornamental.”

“How can you say so, Violet?” exclaimed Lord Henry—I declare I think her a very strik-

ing woman; you forget her tail-coat. If her maid would only sew on a couple of buttons behind, I would wear it myself at the next ball you give."

"I saw she was making an impression upon Henry the other evening," remarked Lady Oswestry.

"It is not that I am exactly in love with her," he returned; "but I have such a warm regard for old family acquaintances. Now she says her father was very intimate with my grandfather, the old Lord Shields."

"Why, you know that's quite impossible," said Lady Oswestry; "grandpapa intimate with a man like that!"

"I would not tell lies if I set up for a saint!" cried Mrs. Falconer, contemptuously.

"You ladies are so severe upon each other!" retorted Lord Henry; "now I have the highest opinion of Miss Hopper's integrity. Poor grandpapa used to be *very* intimate with his servants; hadn't he a butler named Hopper, or a footman? His valet, I remember, was a Spaniard, for I

used to call him Gil Blas to teaze him. The fellow's name was Diaz."

"Poor, dear grandpapa!" said Lady Oswestry. "How kind he used to be to us children! Don't you remember when he was in town for Christmas, how he used to take us to the toyman's in North Audley-street, wasn't it—or Maddox-street?"

"To be sure, Violet! there it was!—I have it!" cried Lord Henry, starting up.

"What? where? you quite frighten me!"

"The toyshop! don't you remember? Hopper! How often he used to say, 'Well, Hopper, here I am again—these little folks are bent upon ruining me;' and don't you know when he used to pretend he had no more money, and old Hopper used to say, 'Oh! my lord, that's of no consequence, your lordship;' and grin, and grandpapa would say, 'I wish every body was of your opinion, Mr. Hopper.'"

Lady Oswestry and Regina were in fits of laughter.

"I recollect him as well," said Lady Oswestry,

“as I do any body. He had those manners! It was—‘What will your little ladyship like?’ and ‘Is not that a pretty toy, your little lordship?’ You watch Miss Hopper trying to ingratiate herself with Violet—she’s very like her father.”

“How I will draw her out about her father!” cried Lord Henry; “I’m quite impatient to see her again.”

“Is this the way she looks?” inquired Lady Oswestry, rolling her eyes at Regina.

“No, sweeter—so!” said Regina, making the very fac-simile of Winny’s fondest glance.

“Capital! do it again! let me do it!” cried Lady Oswestry; “now I’ll try it in the glass! When I want to be very captivating, I shall be ready armed.”

“I know, mama, how Miss Hopper comes to be here,” said Lady Violet, who had been sent for by her mother to speak about her costumes, and then forgotten.

Every body was eager to hear what Violet had to say; she looked extremely scornful and disgusted, and went on coldly.

“Mrs. Chillingworth’s maid told Laurette, that one day her mistress was very much vexed about a bill she had to pay, of twenty-seven pounds thirteen and eightpence.”—Here a general burst of laughter interrupted the young lady, who remained perfectly grave, with an indignant expression.

“Then Mrs. Chillingworth’s maid said, that her mistress was so harassed, for the tradesman was very rude in insisting on his money, that her mistress was in tears; and Miss Hopper, being shewn in, promised to give her the sum if she was permitted to accompany Mrs. Chillingworth to Piermont.”

“I really am quite offended with Mrs. Chillingworth!” cried Lady Oswestry, almost inarticulate with laughing—“I don’t think I shall ever ask her to Piermont again.”

“But what an ‘artful dodger’ is Miss Hopper!” returned Lord Henry.

“And now we know exactly the price of a ticket of admission to Piermont!” laughed Mrs. Falconer.

“I think I’ll stipulate that I am to go halves,

next time," said Lady Oswestry; "a little ready money never comes amiss."

"Then this Miss Hopper is a fortune, I suppose?" said Lord Henry.

"I wonder if she plays *écarté*!" exclaimed Captain Falconer.

"You can tell us, Regina," said Lady Oswestry.

"Miss Hopper used to think cards very wicked," answered Regina; "but her views are apt to change, and, though *I* should call her very well off, I dare say that you grand people would say she was little better than a pauper."

"You, indeed!" said Lady Oswestry laughing; "why, you are richer than any of us!"

"I *was* not," said Regina; "we lived in a little house with two maid-servants, and I was always very happy," and her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Nature never intended you for such a position, my dear," said Lady Oswestry gaily; "some people are born great."

"I am not of the number," she answered, regaining her composure as she spoke. "I am fond of quiet; I suppose I am not very strong."

"Then I am sure you have no business walking out with the children in such weather," cried Lady Oswestry.

"And I for one announce that if Miss Howard goes, I go too," said Lord Henry. "I am sure she requires somebody to protect her from the attentions of my cousin Exmoor."

"I like his attentions," she retorted.

"Such frankness is very praiseworthy," said Mrs. Falconer, laughing.

"And I like walking alone with Miss Carleton and the children," she added with emphasis.

"Henry thinks frankness may be carried too far," laughed Lady Oswestry.

What he thought Regina did not pause to inquire; she merely took care to start with Edith at a time when she had just seen Lord Henry with a cigar in his mouth, going with two or three of the gentlemen in the direction of the stables.

It was so cold that the children were glad to run forward with their hoops, and Regina was equally glad to seize the opportunity of speaking to Miss Carleton. She began with a little tremor

in her voice. "Edith, I am older than you; will you let me speak to you as a friend?"

Miss Carleton blushed easily; she was crimson to the temples before Regina had done speaking; but she said cordially, "I shall be very much obliged to you."

"That means, you know, always—let me say something disagreeable," pursued Regina, trying to speak lightly; "that is the privilege of friends. I can't help thinking that the children here are more than you can manage."

"They are indeed!" said Edith, and her face brightened as if she had expected quite a different subject to be broached. "I do think—for, amiable, engaging children as they really are, (I mean the two younger ones,)—they are very naughty. It is not only that they fight at a minute's notice, but when they do not like to do their lessons, they will not. Exmoor quietly put by his books this morning, because he preferred making boats of walnut shells; and Clara sat before the piano with her kitten on her lap, making it play the scale with its front paws, instead of practising herself."

“But then, my dear Edith, don't you think that you had better relinquish this situation for one in which you could be more influential? Where the children are older, for instance.”

“You see, Regina, when Lady Oswestry engaged me, she told me that my singing was such an object, she cared very little about my powers of teaching, if I would but keep them out of mischief, which I do in a measure. Lord Exmoor has two hours twice a week of the curate Mr. Best, and Violet is most diligent with her music, so that I do not feel quite thrown away.”

“The fact is, Edith, to speak without reserve, I do not think Piermont a very safe place for pretty people, or for rich people,” she added, laughing; “there are so many gentlemen coming and going. I shall be very glad when my time comes to withdraw to the old house on the common again.”

“I think you have guessed—I think you have in your mind——” Edith faltered.

“It has occurred to me,” said Regina, looking another way, “that you have no female friend here to screen you from attentions that may mean

nothing, or to warn you that you may lose your peace of mind, while a more worldly person would derive from the same cause only a few weeks' amusement."

"Ah! you don't know him!" cried Miss Carleton with fervour. "He is incapable of trifling with any one. He is so noble! He has said to me, that before every thing he holds a woman's feelings as sacred!"

"It sounds very well," said Regina; "but, having said so much, I think he ought to say more."

"He has said he is poor—that he cannot consult his own wishes—at least, that he must wait. Dear Regina, do think well of him!"

"I shall be very glad to do so," she replied; "but, dear Edith, your position is a very delicate one. Forgive me if I say that you had better leave Piermont; you can *wait* at a distance, as well as here; in many respects, believe me, much better."

"I—I'll think it over—I'll consult *him*," said Edith; "indeed, except you, I have no one else to

consult—I have now no relations unless I may call Mr. Morley one, and he is living at Milan with his family.”

“He ought to make you an allowance!” exclaimed Regina. “He must be very rich, and he managed to secure all your mother’s fortune.”

“He does allow me five-and-twenty pounds a year,” returned Edith.

“Pitiful creature!” cried Regina.

“Do you know, Regina, I was so frightened when I heard you were coming on purpose for Lord Henry,” said Edith; “I knew your fortune would be so acceptable to his family. They all wish him to marry an heiress. And you know he *is* so handsome.”

“Very,” said Regina drily; “but, notwithstanding his beauty, my dear Edith, people have different tastes, and mine does not do homage to Lord Henry.”

“But you must like him! Think what a fortune yours is!—and to relinquish that for *my* sake! I, who have nothing in the world!”

“My dear Edith, before he can relinquish

Beyminstre for any motive, he must stand some chance of obtaining it. Now it so happens that my opinions on these subjects were very early decided. I shall never marry—not even Lord Henry.”

“How happy you make me!” cried Edith—“because I well know that money is not your only attraction. Every one is talking of your grace and beauty; and then your singing, it is much better than mine, and your accomplishments—Lord Oswestry, who is scarcely ever pleased, is charmed with *you*.”

“You will make me vain, Edith,” said Regina smiling; “but do not forget my advice—consult yourself, not Lord Henry. No man is capable of advising a woman on a point of delicacy. There are some—I hope a good many—who can tell right from wrong, but the finer shades of feeling belong to us. Consider that a marriage with Lord Henry would not be agreeable to his family—as far as we can judge it would be any thing but pleasant to Lady Oswestry, under whose roof you both are; and remember, he has not yet asked you to

be his wife, though it appears he has hinted his regret that he cannot do so. Don't you think, under these circumstances, you would be better away? I am not giving you empty advice; I offer you a home at any time, for as long as you please, at my cottage at Holmwood, where my old trusty servants will take every care of you."

"Dear Regina, you are indeed a friend! Some day I may thankfully avail myself of your kindness; but just now I cannot leave Piermont—things are not decided—but they may be arranged sooner than you think for."

"Well, Edith," said Regina, as the children joined them—"only do not let it be too late!"

The party at dinner was very small that day, and, as they were waiting in the drawing-room before dinner, Lady Oswestry called her cousin to her side.

"We are quite *sans façon* to day, Henry," she said; "you can take Miss Howard in to dinner."

"Thank you all the same—I am going to indulge my feelings for once, and offer my arm to

the toyman's daughter. I never did such a thing before."

"Don't be ridiculous, Henry! I think the woman has bewitched you."

"To a certain extent she has—her eyes are irresistible."

So they went in to dinner together. Winny squeaking like a guinea-pig with glee at walking arm in arm with a lord, sitting next him, and attended to as if she was a duchess.

Lord Henry's attentions were indeed very marked; he had not taken charge of Winny for nothing—he now set to work with the determined purpose of making her tipsy. He pledged her in Champagne, and then insisted on her trying the sparkling Moselle—he made her drain a bumper of old Madeira, and then almost forced upon her an enormous glass of Amontillado. At every fresh twinkle of her eyes, Lady Oswestry shook from head to foot with suppressed laughter; Captain and Mrs. Falconer exchanged glances; and Lord Oswestry looked rather astonished, and tried to make the conversation general.

They were all talking and laughing about the new novel—The Ward of Thorpe Combe—which was just out, and which every body was reading eagerly.

“It is the best novel I ever read,” said Lord Henry—“there is no love in it (worth mentioning)—and that is new at any rate, in a world where, they tell us, there’s nothing new.”

“I did not know that was a merit in your eyes,” said Lady Oswestry, satirically.

“I think the heroine so disagreeable!” exclaimed Mrs. Falconer—“now, really, one meets enough disagreeable people in the world, one expects something a little charming in a novel.”

“It kept me up half the night I know,” said Lord Oswestry, “till I should not have been sorry to drop in upon one of the heiress’s little suppers.”

“She was one of the most sensible girls I ever read of, with her little bullet-head!” cried Lady Oswestry.

“I tried to get up an interest in the story,” said Sir Alban; “but it would not do. I cannot see

the merit of a delineation of low cunning and its success, which, after all, any paltry attorney could surpass."

"Why, certainly, these small vices are not poetical," said Lord Henry.

"And the author seems to have committed the mistake of administering poetical justice at the end," said Sir Alban; "one would think she did not know the world. Fraud always answers."

"Not always!" interposed Miss Hopper, with her head extremely on one side, and that barley-sugar expression in her eyes that Lady Oswestry delighted to counterfeit. "But I think," she added, glancing at Regina, "that we had better change the subject at present—we have all many temptations and many besetting sins, you know—and we can't tell what we should do in the same situation; people will do a great deal to get possession of a great estate."

Winny threw her eyes and her words so decidedly at Regina during this exordium, that her meaning could not fail to strike every one round the table. Sir Alban turned quickly from

Winny to Miss Howard, took her meaning suddenly, and coloured deeply, as if, Regina thought, he was ashamed to have his own suspicions put into words. But on the beautiful transparent paleness of her features not the slightest tinge was discernible. Her finely carved lips contracted with scorn, to which all words would have been weak; and from the depths of her splendid eyes, light flashed quick as the bolt from the thunder-cloud on Miss Hopper's devoted head—then turning calmly to Lord Oswestry she said—

“I am more interested in every chapter. I hope, Lord Oswestry, that you don't forget you promised me the third volume as soon as you had finished it.”

“I am keeping it for you,” he said, with his peculiar smile, which she always liked, because it reminded her of what Alban used to be. “I hope you will be taken in, as I was, by the catastrophe.”

“Oh, don't tell me!” exclaimed Regina.

He smiled again, amused as he always was by

the genuine *naïveté* of her manner. He had seen with grave displeasure the ill-nature of Miss Hopper ; and, though he did not choose to take notice of it, he was not the less disgusted by her malice. Instead, however, of letting the subject drop, he went on talking of the Ward of Thorpe Combe, and all the characters in the book.

Meantime, Lord Henry plied Winny with glass after glass, till, I am sorry to say, that, though she always played her part very well at table, she began to feel the effects, and to display them too, by making such affectionate use of her eyes to her neighbours, that it was very difficult for the rest of the company to preserve their gravity ; except Lord Oswestry, who was not disposed to look favourably upon any joke of Lord Henry's, and who thought the whole proceeding very annoying, and very ill-timed.

As for Mr. Le Fevre and Mr. Edmonds, at the two opposite ends of the room, they felt that they had a character for decorum to keep up before the footmen ; and the solemn grimaces, by means of which they preserved their self-

possession, were not the least absurd features of the scene.

"No, I won't, Lord Henry! naughty man, I will not!" exclaimed Winny, withdrawing her glass at dessert from the decanter which he approached to it.

"This is a new kind of sherry," he urged; "you ought to taste this, Miss Hopper—only half a glass."

"Bad man!" said Winny, allowing him to gain his point, and giving him a pat on the arm which sent Lady Oswestry almost into hysterics.

Lord Oswestry could bear it no longer.

"I think, Lady Oswestry," he said, "if you mean to rehearse your groups this evening, you will not have too much time; perhaps (with a severe glance towards Winny)—perhaps you had better move."

"I'm quite ready," said her ladyship, inclining her head to the ladies; "only I don't wish to hurry any one."

"Are you coming?" asked Winny, gazing at Lord Henry.

“Presently,” he returned; “and I hope you will sing me that song you promised.”

Winny followed behind Mrs. Falconer, but pushed herself before Regina in a great hurry, exclaiming—

“I’m the eldest of us two girls!”

“Poor Henry!” whispered Lady Oswestry to Regina; “I dare say my lord is making himself as disagreeable as possible to him, just for this little bit of fun, as if it mattered when we were alone; for I don’t call the Falconers any one. And she surpassed herself—didn’t she, my love? That last look!”

“Indeed, Lady Oswestry, I was so shocked that I hardly knew how to sit at table. It is so dreadful for a woman to drink too much.”

“Dear, I thought it very amusing—but what is the matter now? I say, Regina, she is crying!”

“People sometimes do, I have heard, when they have taken more than they ought,” said Regina.

It was too true; the large tears were rolling down Winny’s placid face, not a feature of which betrayed emotion.

On reaching the drawing-room, she had made up to the children, who were always there of an evening; but Lady Violet had turned her back upon her, and had said to her sister—

“You should not speak to that woman, Clara; she has no business to be here.”

At this rebuff, Winny, after crying a little while, shot up into her own room; and soon afterwards the gentlemen entered, and Regina saw Lord Oswestry go solemnly up to his lady.

“That person must be got rid of, Lady Oswestry,” he said; “she made herself very conspicuous at dinner.”

“*That person* is doubtless Miss Hopper,” returned her ladyship; “but I may just hint to the present company, that it was not *I* who asked her to prolong her stay at Piermont.”

There was an irony in Lady Oswestry’s manner when she pleased that chafed Regina, and, it is possible, might chafe her lord; for he looked much annoyed, and said—“She made several remarks that were in the worst possible taste, as she seemed to have some person present in view.”

“Oh, she meant *me*, Lord Oswestry!” cried Regina—“but I am used to her. Pray, don’t banish her from her paradise on my account! Don’t mind me!”

“Indeed, Miss Howard,” he said, his tone quite changing, “I do mind you very much; I don’t choose you to be annoyed at my table. Besides which, it occurred to me that she made a little too free—that she, in fact——”

“*Elle s’était grisée un peu*—the confession sounds better in French,” retorted Lady Oswestry; “but we *all* have our little weaknesses.”

She pointed this speech at her lord quite as much as Winny had pointed hers at Regina. He looked quite exasperated.

“However,” she added, “as I should rather like to clear her out before we have our *tableaux*, I will dismiss the good woman. I suppose you will not object to my inventing a civil reason?”

“Just as you please,” he replied coldly.

Lady Oswestry sat musing and looking very mischievous for a little while, and then rose idly and went out of the room.

Regina went among the children as usual, where Edith sat with her crochet-work. Lord Henry did not come near them; he was flirting with Mrs. Falconer. Miss Carleton kept watching them with suspended breath, and a cheek that grew paler and paler. Presently Lord Oswestry came to ask Regina to look at a water-colour sketch that he had placed on a small reading-desk for her to see. It represented a scene in Egypt—one of the strange groups of gigantic statues which are found at a little distance from the banks of the Nile, but which at certain seasons are unapproachable from the sandy plains where they stand, being inundated by the rise of the river. The hot angry sky, and the water around their bases, contrasted well with the grand calm expression of these curious remains.

Lord Oswestry gave her a chair, and stood leaning behind it while they talked.

“And who is the artist?” asked Regina.

“My cousin Willingham. I had some difficulty in getting this out of him—for, whether it is pride or humility I know not, but he is very shy about his sketches.”

“ But surely this is very beautiful !”

“ I think so ; he says it is a daub.”

“ I wish to ask you,” said Regina, turning back in her chair, “ whether *I* could travel in Egypt, with propriety, when I come of age ?”

“ Miss Howard can make it a condition that her wedding tour should be to Egypt.”

“ But, putting aside wedding tours and all that nonsense, which is never going to happen,” cried Regina, “ could a staid single woman take the proper servants and interpreters, and travel through some parts of Egypt, or could she not ?”

“ I should think a beautiful young woman had better join some party about to travel—such a thing is very easy to find.”

“ I could not bear that. If I were to call myself Mrs. Howard, could I ? Where would be the danger ? the Bedouin Arabs would not attack me if I had a proper escort. The Pasha of Egypt would not want my money, as these smooth gentlemen do, and, besides that, I want to go to Iceland !”

“ You are insatiable, Miss Howard ; but I should recommend such a charming young widow to stay

quietly at home for another ten or fifteen years. Alban, we are discussing your painting; it has given this young lady a sudden passion for travelling."

"The country is worth seeing, which is more than I could say for my sketch," replied Sir Alban, coldly.

"Miss Howard thinks it beautiful," said Lord Oswestry; "and I understand that her opinion is worth having, for her own drawings are full of talent."

"I am the more surprised at your skill," said Regina, determined to speak, "since I never heard Mrs. Willingham mention even that you drew, and she was not apt to be silent on your merits."

"It is only of late years that I have taken it up," he said; "but I had been accustomed to military drawing, and I found these rough sketches, such as they are, easy enough."

"I think," said Regina, turning to look at the drawing again, "that you inherit your mother's talent."

“ Ah !” said Lord Oswestry, “ you heard of him pretty often, I dare say.”

“ Very often,” she replied ; “ but, as I told you, I think, this is not the first time I have seen Sir Alban—he was twice at Dykeham.”

“ True !” said his lordship with a laugh ; “ you recalled the acquaintance when he seemed to have forgotten it. How any one could forget *you*, I am at a loss to imagine ; but if I were you I would never forgive him.”

“ Never !” said Regina, looking up to Lord Oswestry and laughing, while she could feel her own heart beat ; “ women never do ! Is not it Sam Slick who says, ‘ If there is a creetur who never forgives, it is a woman ? ’ ”

“ And a parson !” added his lordship laughing on ; “ they are still worse.”

“ Oh fie ! Lord Oswestry !” she cried.

“ I am only quoting,” he answered ; “ don’t make me answerable for the sins of Judge Haliburton.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“AND how do you think I managed?” asked Lady Oswestry, dropping down beside Regina as soon as the chair was vacant.

“I have been wondering,” she replied.

“Don’t breathe a word to any living creature,” said her ladyship, beginning to laugh, “and I’ll tell you—I told her that Henry was in love with her!”

“My dear Lady Oswestry!”

“I did! if you could have heard the nonsense I talked, you would have given me credit for a quick invention. I said that Oswestry was his guardian—when he has a father living, you know, and besides is twenty-eight years old; and I told her, with my handkerchief at my eyes, that my lord intended him to make another match, and that he

desired her to leave Piermont directly. She cried abundantly; but I could see she was so delighted with her conquest, she quite felt it an honour to be turned out of Piermont for his sake. She goes to-morrow early. Ah, Regina! I know who Henry really does love; but he is full of delicacy—he knows he is poor, and he dreads the idea of being thought mercenary; in such a case as his, it is generous in the lady to make a little advance.”

“If she shares his sentiments, certainly,” said Regina.

“I do hope with all my heart that you have no idea of Alban Willingham,” said Lady Oswestry, very earnestly; “not that *I* dislike him—for I think those cold, proud people rather pleasant, but it would so please my lord if he were to succeed.”

“I acquit him of trying, at any rate,” said Regina; “and I should think you might acquit me, too, in that quarter.”

“True! I have thought you rather cool,” replied her ladyship, “and I am very glad of it. He is as proud as Lucifer, that man!”

Now, as Winny did really leave Piermont the

next morning, not exactly with drums beating and colours flying, but in rather a sneaking kind of manner, those who did not know her might have thought that she would have refrained ever after from boasting of her visit to the Oswestrys. But those people did not know her, indeed! I believe nobody from that day forth ever spent an hour in Miss Hopper's company without being entertained with anecdotes of the whole Oswestry family, and all their guests, besides being instructed in all the customs of Piermont, as much as if it were a new island discovered in the South Seas.

To her intimate friends she said, that Lady Oswestry had wished her to spend the whole winter there; but that, having unfortunately made a conquest of a young marquis staying in the house, she had thought it right to go away at once, for the naughty man would *not* take a refusal! To Mr. Brand she said, that she could not stay away longer from her dear Holmwood duties; and that she was not sorry to leave a place where Regina Howard was flirting and giving herself airs in such a way that her poor dear grandmama would not have

known her again! In fact, she managed to tell the story in every quarter very much to her own advantage; and she bought a quantity of smart clothes, greatly to the astonishment of her mama, in which she sat waiting day after day for Lord Henry, for she expected that he would not take Lord Oswestry's cruel decision so quietly as he did. She even laid out threepence in a theatrical print, representing some Adelphi hero as the Red Rover; which, she fancied, bore some resemblance to her persecuted lover. So much mischief may be done by a foolish jest! For, though Winny was over forty, she took the affair to heart like a girl of eighteen, and made herself very wretched and very ridiculous.

Regina was growing very fond of Lord Oswestry—he reminded her perpetually of what Alban used to be. His footstep was so like, that she hardly ever distinguished which was coming. Sometimes her colour would rise if she heard, as she thought, Sir Alban coming into the room, and it would turn out to be Lord Oswestry after all. Whenever Lord Oswestry came up to her chair,

and stood looking down upon her with that kind reserved smile that seemed as if it was not given to every body, her eyes kindled with pleasure. She could always speak with much more ease to him than to his lady. She felt as if he understood her. Whenever she was ignorant of what she ought to do, even in a question of dress, she would waylay Lord Oswestry, and ask him with that soft ingenuous regard that delighted him, what he would recommend.

A day or two before the charade party she met him on the stairs, and shyly asked him if he thought she might still wear black crape, with black ornaments, when they had so many people.

"Nothing could be better," he returned; "but why don't you ask my lady?"

"Because I don't like to expose my ignorance to her."

"You don't care about me, then?"

"No! because you won't despise it so much."

"Do you know that Lawler is coming? I admire his spirit. He says he will not give up all hope. He has not had a fair trial."

“As he pleases; but I want to ask you another thing. May I retire after the *tableaux*? Lady Oswestry talks of a quadrille party later in the evening, and I am not yet fit for gaiety.”

“You shall do just as you please. Keep in the shade as long as you can—‘Making a sunshine of a shady place,’ which I take to be about as impossible an achievement as was ever put into verse.”

“Now, I want something else!”

“Money?”

“Oh, no!”

“You are certainly the most moderate young heiress——”

“I have no right to be extravagant—I was frugally brought up.”

“But they are generally the worst.”

By this time they had got to the bottom of the stairs, and were walking slowly across the hall.

“I should be so glad if, when you and my lady go out to pay your visits, you would leave me quietly here with Miss Carleton and the children.

I am still in mourning, and I am not fit to go out."

The tears were standing in her eyes.

"I see you wish it," he said, "and you shall always do as you like here. It will be very dull for you; but, if you prefer dulness, I must reconcile Lady Oswestry to going without you."

"Ah! there she is, flirting with my lord," cried Mrs. Falconer, who was coming down-stairs with Lady Oswestry, both in riding-habits; "we shall know where to look for her another time."

"She does not know how to flirt, poor soul!" said Lady Oswestry, taking Regina's arm. "Why don't you ride?"

"Because I have had a long walk already."

"Come and see me mount—I am going to try Sir Alban's Persian mare."

"Yes! Miss Howard; you must come and look at Mootec," said Lord Oswestry; and he went out with her into the portico, where she had the pleasure of seeing Sir Alban help Lady Oswestry to her horse, and stand arranging the folds of her habit with the greatest care, while Lord Henry

performed the same office to Mrs. Falconer, with an off-hand careless manner that certainly did not savour of the times of Addison or Steele. Regina could not but look back to the days when she would not have believed any kind friend (say Winny) who had depicted a scene wherein she was standing by unnoticed, while Alban was paying attention to another woman. She could not have once supposed that she would have seen him offer his favourite horse to any lady but herself. But she was aware that time was past, and she reflected with gratitude that a worse time was past also—that time of restless anxiety, doubt, fear, suspense, which had nearly worn her out, was gone too; it had carried with it all her gaiety of spirit, all her keen young relish of life, but the pain was gone, and now could never return again.

“I have some energy left,” she thought, as she stood with her eyes unconsciously fixed on Alban, leaning against Mootee’s brilliant neck, and talking to Lady Oswestry, whose beautiful face was stooped over him; “I can live down a mistake!” She fancied Alban watched her, as if to see how

she liked the transfer of his attentions; but he had lost the power to wound her now. She smiled slightly as this thought struck her, and addressed some trifling remark to Lord Oswestry about the horses.

“How pensive we look!” laughed Mrs. Falconer, pointing with her riding-whip to Regina; “I think we are jealous that we have not the offer of Mootee!”

Sir Alban looked hard at her, as if he wished to catch her eye and make her speak. She answered Mrs. Falconer, with the same slight smile on her lips:—

“You are thinking of La Belle Stewart and the king’s new coach—but the world has grown wiser since that time.”

“Not the feminine world, Miss Howard,” called Lord Henry across Mrs. Falconer; “the ladies remain as they were before the flood.”

“When I dare say Mrs. Noah would have given her earrings for the first sail in her husband’s yacht,” added Mrs. Falconer.

“Are we going to ride to-day?” asked Lady

Oswestry. And at this appeal they all started off.

Sir Alban turned and looked at Regina, as she stood beside Lord Oswestry—the long folds of her rich silk dress sweeping the marble step of the Perron; her arms, in the tight sleeves so becoming to a slender figure, dropped easily before her; her hands slightly clasped together; the lines of her head and neck rivalling those of his beautiful horse in high-bred grace. She seemed to feel the cold, and passed before his lordship into the house again.

Mrs. Falconer's jest had not disturbed her in the least. Lord Oswestry never addressed to her a word of gallantry—never even by too admiring a glance ruffled her serenity. There was a purity of heart about her that was her perfect safeguard.

The truth is, that with respect to the young ladies, and there were more than one or two, of whom very sad stories were told in connexion with Lord Oswestry, they were more to blame than some people were willing to allow.

Girls are often flattered by attentions they have

no possible right to accept. They encourage and respond to them without the least idea of becoming guilty; but they wilfully indulge their vanity, perhaps their sensibility, to a certain point, and then they lose their self-command, their feelings are bewildered, and they become victims. And perhaps the reason why women are less lenient than men to these offenders, is, that they very well know how much it is in a woman's power to check the first advances of a dissolute man; how much may be done in answering glances and tones that ought to be repressed at the onset; while men only argue that a girl does not desire to be actually guilty, and think nothing of how much she does desire that she ought not to indulge.

This little harmless ride, on the first breaking up of the frost, was, however, productive of one vexatious incident that Regina had not anticipated.

Mrs. Falconer came home with a toothache, and the next morning appeared with a swelled face. Lord Henry sat looking at her with unequivocal symptoms of dismay; for in the next day's *tableau* she was to play *Margaret* to his *Faust*.

After breakfast he was seen whispering eagerly to Lord Oswestry, and presently the latter came up to Regina, as she was selecting a book from the shelves, and asked her if she would have any great objection to appearing in the second *tableau*; Mrs. Falconer had admitted that she was suffering too much (Lord Oswestry would not say “disfigured too much,” when speaking of a lady) to take so prominent a position.

“*I*—with my dark hair! My dear Lord Oswestry, I am glad I have a reason which prevents me from appearing disobliging—an insuperable objection—Margaret *must* have light hair!”

Lord Henry did not seem overwhelmed by her refusal; he admitted the truth of the observation, and, turning to Lady Oswestry, remarked carelessly—“I think your little governess would do, Violet; her hair would be just the right colour.”

Regina looked eagerly at Lord Oswestry, as if to beg that he would interfere, but he was silent. Lady Oswestry laughed rather ironically, but said she thought it was a good suggestion. The little Carleton had a very pretty face, and

not a bad figure, though her hands and feet were plebeian.

“ Shall I go and propose it ? ” asked Lord Henry, with more interest than he was aware of.

“ Thank you ! I’ll save you the trouble,” returned her ladyship ; “ I am going to the school-room.”

“ And so am I,” thought Regina ; “ and I will try if I can prevent it.”

But it appeared that Lady Oswestry considered she had bought Miss Carleton for so much a year—she announced to her that she was to stand for Margaret, laughed at her timid expression of repugnance, asked after Violet’s music, and then left the room.

Regina felt that it would be cruel to harass Edith on a subject where she had no liberty of choice, and therefore sat down to give Lord Exmoor a lesson in arithmetic instead ; and the next time she visited the schoolroom, Mrs. Falconer’s maid was fitting on the blue velvet bodice, that was a world too wide for Edith’s slender figure.

And now the eventful night is come. Invitations

have been sent out far and near; for people don't take all this trouble and expense without wishing to reap a great harvest of admiration. A large room, used sometimes as a theatre, is prepared; a military band, belonging to a regiment in the neighbourhood, composes the orchestra. The curtain is down in front of the stage—not a green curtain, but a beautiful landscape with pastoral figures, gilt and blazoned like a fan. The guests are entering. Lord Oswestry has a great lady on his arm. At a respectful distance Regina is led in by Sir John Lawler, who takes the opportunity as they go up-stairs to “hope that he is not disagreeable to her.”

She replies frankly—“Not particularly; but she wishes to lead a single life.”

Sir John is therefore as gay as a lark, and thinks he is already master of Beyminstre; for he argues that all girls talk that kind of nonsense, which they never mean. In which opinion he is mistaken; for very few girls in these days would dare to say so, lest they should be taken at their word.

The room is softly lit by ground-glass lamps,

and the company are standing about in groups before the show begins.

The colonel of the regiment, who with some of his officers is invited, is quite frantic to be presented to Regina—for he is a single man; but he cannot get hold of Lord Oswestry, and he hardly knows any one else in the room. So, as he cannot speak to her, the next best thing is to stare at her, which he does heartily, as she stands, in her long black dress and crown of white roses, just beneath a cluster of lamps, looking as transparent and spiritual as she did (Sir Alban well remembers the time) when he walked home with her from Bradford, and she wore the wreath his mother's fingers had woven. Leaning on a chair, he gazed at her differently, but far more intently than the colonel.

“Is that the heiress?” asked an officer of a gentleman standing near. “She looks as if she was not long for this world. I should not wonder now if Willingham were to come into Beyminstre after all.”

“How so?” inquired his companion.

“I bet you what you like she don't live to come

of age, and then the estate goes to him as heir-at-law; for you know a minor can't make a will. Twenty—is she? She don't look it, I should have guessed her about seventeen.”

The gentleman, having a little more decency than his military friend, did not care to discuss the chances of the young lady's decease within a few feet of where she stood—fearing that she might, as indeed she did, hear every word they said. She happened at the moment to meet Sir Alban's look fixed on her, and she replied to it by a slight half melancholy smile, as if she thought such a solution of all her difficulties possible, and not much to be dreaded.

He started forward as if going to speak to her; but a sudden blast of horns from the band announced the opening of the Mendelssohn's wedding march, and warned the company to take their places.

And now the curtain rises upon a dazzling group of waxwork—so still, so brightly coloured, so softened by the white tarlatane stretched in front of the scene, that Regina is obliged to collect

her thoughts before she can believe that she is looking at living people, with whom she mixes every day.

In front of a low cottage, close to the seashore and backed by rugged cliffs, a beautiful woman in peasant costume is seated making lace. One lovely child, her hands clasped behind her, is standing at her mother's knee, watching the progress of the bobbins; the other little fairy, seated on the ground, is playing with a heap of shells. A fisherman halfway up the rocks is turning, as if to bid adieu to his family, while a boy in sailor costume is collecting the nets at the doorway.

The brilliant light steepes all as in a halo of sunshine; Lady Oswestry's arms look like alabaster, her hair shines like satin, her eyes sparkle like rain-drops in the sun. The ladies cannot contain their admiration of Lord Henry—of his splendid complexion—his gallant bearing—his enormous fisherman's boots. The gentlemen wax surly, and think him a conceited, impertinent coxcomb. Regina wonders with all her might

how the children can keep so still, and it is with a pang of regret that she sees the curtain descend on the group. M. Le Fevre advances in a storm of applause to the foot-lights, and mentions in an apologetic tone, peculiar to himself, that the first two syllables have been represented.

"It is rather a trick we have played them," said Regina, as Lord Oswestry made his way in front of her chair.

"So much the better. How do you like it?"

"Oh! it is beautiful beyond description! I had no idea a tableau could be so attractive; I thought they were taking a great deal more trouble than it was worth; but I was quite wrong."

"Listen! it is worth while," said Lord Oswestry, smiling down on her.

"Sea—no! sea is one syllable; cottage—woman—nets—fisherman—children, perhaps."

Here the colonel made a frantic plunge at Lord Oswestry, and whispered a request that he might be presented to Miss Howard. Which his lordship did, and that eager officer, turning round in

his chair to the great inconvenience of his neighbours, fixed his fierce eyes upon Regina, and began at once.

“Pretty scene they’ve given us,” he said.

Regina acquiesced.

“Do you know the word?”

“I am one of the initiated,” she replied.

“Give us a hint, Miss Howard,” urged Sir John Lawler on the other side.

She shook her head; and presently the curtain rose again.

The stage is dark, an iron lamp hanging from the roof of a dungeon scarcely illumines the scene.

It is the last outline from Retsch’s *Faust*. Margaret stands in the centre, almost covered with her dishevelled golden hair—her arms uplifted—her appealing face raised to heaven. Faust, all entreaty, endeavours gently to force her to leave her prison. Mephistopheles, seizing the arm of Faust, warns him that his time is expired, and that he must leave Margaret to her fate.

There was a general exclamation at the touch-

ing beauty of Margaret. Lord Henry, resplendent in velvet and ostrich plumes, was declared to be handsomer than ever. Captain Falconer looked, and possibly felt, exactly like Mephistopheles.

But Edith was the theme of all around.

“Upon my word, they played it *con amore*.”

“It is well if the jest does not become earnest one day.”

“Faust is nothing to Henry Montresor; and *she* is lovely enough to play Margaret over again.”

“Only a governess, too!”

“Ah! the more danger.”

Regina felt her cheeks glow; she determined again to urge her friend to leave Piermont.

The conjectures were as numerous as before.

The prevailing idea seemed to be “prison;” which was natural, only it did not seem to connect itself with any thing that had gone before.

And now the curtain rises upon a stately Grecian portico. In the foreground, a warrior, his short sword in his hand, has fallen upon his shield, in the attitude of a dying gladiator. An eager group of women and children, advancing

through the pillars of the porch, seem arrested, horror-stricken at the sight.

It is the Spartan with his mortal wound, who brings the news of the victory, and dies on the threshold of his home.

Lady Oswestry, in her crimson tunic and white pallium, is magnificent in gesture and expression.

Lord Henry, looking pallid under his bronze helmet, almost draws tears from the ladies at the very thought that such a dear man is dying, even in jest.

The room resounds with acclamations; the curtain falls only to be raised again, and again: but the third time it knows its own mind, and won't rise any more, because the performers are gone to change their dresses, and get ready for the ball.

Sir Alban was seated just behind Regina; he seemed determined to address her this evening.

"Miss Howard," he said, leaning forward, "though I had the honour of grouping the performers at rehearsal, I don't know the word. Will you tell me what it is?"

"It is Lace-demon," said Regina directly. She had no notion of coquetting with *him* about it.

"Those first two syllables misled me," he replied.

"I think it was hardly fair," she remarked; "but, in the whole word, Lace does form two syllables."

They were all rising to go.

"I hope, Miss Howard," said Alban, resting his hand on the back of her chair, and speaking in a voice that trembled at every word, "I hope you will not allow the senseless remarks of an ignorant brute to dwell upon your mind."

"Not the least in the world, I assure you," she returned, with the same half sad smile, as she accepted Sir John's arm to go down-stairs again.

The colonel thrust himself forward.

"The first polka, Miss Howard, if you are disengaged?"

"Thank you, I do not dance!"

"Oh, I am sorry for that!" cried Sir John; "not even a quadrille?"

"Nothing, Sir John."

And she glided from her cavalier as soon as she could make her escape, and hastened to her own apartment; breathless, trembling, blushing, agitated; she hardly knew whether by pleasure or pain. Why? she almost laughed at herself for her folly; because Alban had spoken to her. Alban! whom she had given up—whom she had despised—whom she had forgotten—who was no more to her than Sir John Lawler, or Mr. Poole. Alban! who was waltzing at that moment, she had no doubt, with Lady Oswestry, or that bold-eyed Mrs. Falconer. It was very well to talk, she decided at last. Because she was no longer to unite her fate to his, he could not be absolutely indifferent to her—she had the charge of his fortunes; she had promised Sir Herbert to redeem his error; to bestow on Alban the inheritance of his fathers. There was a deep interest in all this—it was worth living for; she hoped she should not die yet—she hoped that foolish man had no reason for what he said.

“Flimsey,” she asked, as that excellent female made her a cup of tea, “do I look very ill to-night?”

“La, mem! what we have all been saying, how well Miss Howard were looking! how beautiful! what graceful elegance!”

“I mean as to health, Flimsey.”

“Dear me, mem, just the health a lady ought to have; the picture of delicate health, as Mr. Edmonds was saying.”

“Very well, Flimsey. Mr. Dargle comes here every day, does he not?”

“Good gracious, mem!” (for Mr. Dargle was the doctor.)

“Don’t be frightened, Flimsey,” said Regina, smiling, “but give me a little more sugar, please.”

CHAPTER IX.

REGINA breakfasted in her own room the next morning. She knew the house was full of guests, who had stayed the night after the ball, and she was glad to be quiet and alone. Not quite alone though; for a little knock at her door was followed by the entrance of Lord Exmoor, who came to ask how she did. She was just beginning to pour out her chocolate, and she invited him to breakfast with her. He was delighted, because he did not have chocolate in the school-room, and because he was never so happy as with Regina.

“This is your sitting-room?” he asked, looking round.

“Yes! I have never made it a dressing-room; I read and paint here, and sometimes play and sing, when the others are gone out.”

"And you sing like an angel," said the child, watching Regina spreading for him some marmalade on a slice of bread.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Cousin Alban said so."

"To you?"

"No, to papa."

"I have not told you how pleased I was last night."

"Which tableau did you like best?"

"I don't know—perhaps the first struck me most, because I had never seen one before."

"And yet it was your arranging."

"Did it tire you much to keep still?"

"Not much; I kept thinking you were looking at me. Cousin Alban was very kind at rehearsal, and tried to find me an easy attitude in the last scene; but I said I would not spoil the tableau on your account."

"Thank you, Exmoor! Did Edith dance last night?"

"Yes! she waltzed with cousin Henry; he is in the school-room now, writing a letter."

“Lord Henry writing a letter in the school-room?”

“Yes! he often does. He says he can’t find any paper in his own room. I think he ought to tell his man to speak to the housekeeper.”

Regina thought so too.

“Do you like cousin Henry?” asked the child.

Regina had a strong objection to say she did like him; but she was afraid that, like most children, Exmoor would tell his cousin, when next he saw him, what she had said, either in praise or censure.

“Ah! my little Exmoor, we like every body,” she returned, laughing; “only some more than others: I like *you* better, for instance, than Lord Henry.”

“Truly?”

“On my word.”

Lord Exmoor held out his hand, and Regina accepted it across the butter-cooler with much solemnity.

“Mr. Dargle, mem,” said Flimsey, inserting her head through the doorway.

“Show in Mr. Dargle, and show out my lord. I shall see you again in the school-room, Exmoor.”

Mr. Dargle was a servile medical man; middle-aged, bald, ill-looking, but tolerably clever in his profession. He bowed humbly to Regina, and took a chair opposite. She was unfortunately very much under the influence of personal appearance, and Mr. Dargle made her shiver; but she was plain-spoken, and so entered into her case at once.

“They say I’m looking ill, Mr. Dargle; and I have a good deal to do.”

“Doubtless! a lady in your position, with your great fortune. Are we suffering in any way?”

“I think I am easily fatigued.”

“In mind as well as body?”

“Yes—in spirits.”

“A little nervous, I dare say,” remarked Mr. Dargle, with his fingers on her pulse.

“I don’t like to be called nervous, Mr. Dargle,” she said with a smile.

“Shall we say a little excitable?” he asked.

“No, that is worse!” she replied. “I want

you to make me a little stronger—that is all. If my health improves, my spirits will take care of themselves.”

Mr. Dargle approached his chair still closer, and said under his breath, “We have not any thing on our mind—have we?”

“I have a great many things on my mind, Mr. Dargle—the most important is, how I shall refurnish the sitting-rooms at Beyminstre.”

“Then,” he returned, pausing, “I think we can give a little tone—a little tone to the constitution. I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again in a day or two.”

She went into the school-room, and found Edith in very low spirits—hardly able to speak without tears; yet anxious to conceal her agitation. She tried not to notice it, and began talking to the children. Little Clara, who was sitting on her lap, said, “Cousin Henry is going into Scotland to-morrow with cousin Alban, to stay with uncle Shields.”

“Indeed!” she said; and she could hardly help adding she was glad of it. Glad that Lord Henry

was going out of the way of Edith; and glad, too, that Sir Alban was going out of *her* way. She could not deny to herself that the old wearing feeling was beginning to harass her anew; she caught herself planning how they were to meet, after the few words that had passed between them. It was the old self-questioning over again: why he had changed? Whether it was the fortune—or whether he had seen any one he preferred—or whether it was merely that he had become tired of the idea?

While she was thus occupied, she looked up, and met Edith's tearful eyes fixed upon her with an inquiring expression; for Miss Carleton believed Lord Henry to be irresistible, and that he had only to hold out his hand for Beyminstre whenever he pleased.

“Will they be long gone?” she asked Clara.

“Only a few weeks,” said the child.

“They are gone for a month,” cried Lord Exmoor.

“No, till April!”

“That is a month—this is February.”

“It’s not! Cousin Henry told me here, this morning, he was going for a few weeks.”

“Four weeks is a few weeks!”

At this retort Clara flung her spelling-book at her brother, and sprang off Regina’s lap. Lord Exmoor rushed at her, and Regina caught him round the waist. Edith held Clara back, shrieking with passion. This scene was so often repeated, that Regina did not now care about it. She held Lord Exmoor fast till his passion was spent, and then gave him over to the maid, who appeared to dress the children for their walk.

“Well, Edith!” she said, as soon as the door closed upon them. “My poor child, what is the matter?”

Edith was putting away the books, and trying to hide her tears at the same time.

“Oh! it’s nothing! I am a little nervous,” she said; “I did not quite expect—it is rather sudden—that is all.”

“Don’t think me unfeeling, but I am thankful it is so for your sake—he has been here too long,” urged Regina.

“ He is going now ; he says it is no use to speak to his father ; he tells me Lord Shields would never consent ; he says there is no hope, except ——” Edith paused.

“ There is no hope, then, dear Edith,” said Regina : “ look at it boldly—you cannot creep into his family—you cannot elope, because your husband must respect you. Lord Henry ought to have thought of all this before.”

“ Oh ! don’t blame *him*,” said Edith, pressing Regina’s hand ; “ you don’t know what he is ! He said he loved me unconsciously ; and then his prospects were better. He had some hopes of a good post in one of the colonies ; but that is all over. And now he is going away, and there is no need for me to leave Piermont.”

“ But he will come back, Edith.”

“ Who knows ? Perhaps not ; and in this place every thing reminds me of him. But here are the children, and I must attend to them when I hardly know where I am.”

“ Leave them to me, Edith ; I will take them off your hands for the present. The Oswestrys are

soon going out, and we shall be quiet and alone. Now, little ones, I mean to take you a long walk; Miss Carleton has a bad headache."

And Regina did take them a long walk, and told them fairy tales, and talked French with Lady Violet, who began slowly to unbend to her, and came home just in time to get ready for luncheon.

Her maid had removed her kid walking-boots, and was lacing on her black *moire bottines*, when Lady Oswestry tapped at her door.

Physiognomists, or rather, structurists, insist that the slightest gestures have a different character in different people. Lady Oswestry rapped with the points of her fingers, in the manner the French call "*Battant la retraite*."

"Oh! the slender foot that we have!" cried her ladyship, as she answered Regina's invitation to come in; "do you know you would be a very dangerous person if you were aware of your own power? But, my dear, there's quite a cabal downstairs at your absence. Now, if you liked me at all, you naughty child, you might do me a little favour!"

“ I wish only that I could do you a great favour, Lady Oswestry.”

“ It is only this—there is Sir John Lawler, and Mr. Poole, and poor Henry, and Colonel St. Aix, all waiting your appearance—all hoping for a look or a word. Now, if you would but flirt with them all together, how amusing it would be! and I am very dull just now that the tableaux are over.”

“ I wish I could satisfy you, Lady Oswestry; but you said truly of me, that I did not know how to flirt.”

“ But, my dear, it is so easy! so simple! I don't think there's a woman living, unless she is very ugly, who is not born a flirt.”

“ I am the exception, then,” said Regina.

“ I do believe it is the novelty that makes the men so wild about you. Colonel St. Aix is here for a few days, solely on your account; and I heard him tell my lord that he would sell his soul to the devil to marry you, if you had not a shilling in the world!”

“ What a wicked wretch!”

“Awful, my love! Oswestry replied, ‘You have a great deal too much to do with the devil as it is, *mon cher!*’ but what a handsome man! Is he not, my dear?”

“I don’t know, Lady Oswestry.”

“Now that is a naughty fib, wicked Regina; what splendid eyes he has—the Irish grey eye—something like yours!”

“Dear, I hope not,” cried Regina, as they entered the dining-room, and she looked nervously round to see if Alban was there.

He was standing on the terrace, just outside the dining-room windows, with three or four of the gentlemen; he seemed to be relating something that amused them very much, for they all closed round, laughing heartily. This jarred on her feelings, and made her very uncomfortable. There was no reason in the world why he should never be merry; but, in her present mood, it seemed to remove him farther from her, and to contrast disagreeably with the impression she retained of their last meeting. Lady Oswestry beckoned them in, and they soon obeyed her summons.

“So you deserted us last night, Miss Howard,” called Lord Henry across the table.

Regina smiled, but she said to herself, “If there ever was a vulgar man on the face of the earth, it is that red-faced, bawling Lord Henry.”

“Miss Howard had soon had enough of you,” said Lord Oswestry.

Regina smiled with more intention than before.

“But I hope you are quite well this morning?” he added.

“Quite, thank you.”

“I know somebody who tells fibs—somebody who sent to see Mr. Dargle to-day!” cried Lady Oswestry, holding up her finger.

“I *am* well, Lady Oswestry; only I have a fancy to be better,” laughed Regina.

“*Stavo bene; per star meglio, sto qui,*” said Lord Oswestry.

“I hoped to have had the pleasure of dancing with you, Miss Howard,” remarked Colonel St. Aix, in the midst of pigeon-pie.

“You are engaged to me, the first quadrille you dance any where,” said Sir John Lawler.

"No, really Sir John!"

"I asked you, as we went down-stairs."

"And I declined."

"But I hoped that the pleasure was only deferred."

"Oh! you hoped, my good fellow—we all hope!" remarked Lord Henry.

"I hope that I am to drive Miss Howard this afternoon," said Lord Oswestry.

"So do I," said Regina, graciously.

Sir Alban looked at her, but said nothing.

"What you two will do at Lord Shields' I cannot imagine," remarked Lady Oswestry, "now that there is neither fishing nor shooting."

"Oh, pardon me! a great deal of shooting. But we mean to scate."

"What! at this time of year?"

"The lake near my father's house will be frozen for the next six weeks."

"What a country!" cried Lady Oswestry, shrugging her shoulders; "it is wonderful how any body can live there who is not obliged. The government should make a Siberia of the High-

lands, and send prisoners there, instead of to Botany Bay!"

Something seemed to have ruffled Lady Oswestry; she did not linger so long as usual over the luncheon, but rose hastily, and formed the parties for riding and driving.

On Lord Henry asking her if she would ride, she answered pettishly that she had been engaged all the morning to drive with Colonel St. Aix; and, to add insult to injury, she gave into his particular charge two sandy and honourable young ladies, who admired him and besieged him in a way to drive a more reasonable man raving mad.

Sir Alban was riding his horse, Tuny. The sandy young ladies were loud in praise of its beauty. It was just before they all mounted, when they were together in the portico, Lord Oswestry waiting with Regina until they had started. Lord Henry exclaimed to Sir Alban, "I say! you take one of those Albinoes off my hands—my lady has given them both to me, and *J'en ai par dessus les epaules*; they ride like Johnny Gilpin!"

Sir Alban therefore mounted one of the girls, and placed himself on her right.

Lord Oswestry, catching Regina's expression, said, "I quite agree with you."

"I did not speak," she replied.

"No! but you looked; you very often need not speak. I agree with you, that Henry's remark was in the worst possible taste. You would never find Willingham say such a thing, even if there were no chance of being overheard."

"People are often very incautious," said Regina; and she told Lord Oswestry, half laughing, of the remark upon her health that she had overheard the evening before.

He was very much annoyed, and expressed himself freely on the ill-manners of the man who could say such a thing in her presence. "It is really atrocious!" he said; "when you think how little one demands of people in society—one does not expect principle, scarcely morality; one does not require sense or education; one is seldom instructed, hardly ever amused; we do but exact good breeding, and we never get it, with some rare exceptions."

Regina thought, though she did not like to say so, that Lord Oswestry was one of the exceptions. Perhaps this thought was sufficiently expressed by her looks, for he smiled at her, half amused and half gratified.

“So that accounts for Dargle’s visit to you this morning?” he said.

“Yes! but I don’t mean to earn your epitaph, notwithstanding.”

“Do not,” he replied. “What does Hamlet say? ‘Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works:’ half the young ladies in England lose their health because they fancy themselves ill. I recommend you to fall in love, Miss Howard.”

“That’s a strange prescription, and one that I do not think Mr. Dargle would sanction,” she replied, laughing with a little constraint; “he hoped this morning that I had nothing on my mind.”

“And may I ask what you replied?”

“That I did not quite know how I should furnish the dining-room at Beyminstre.”

“No time like the present; we will go and see about it.”

They were walking leisurely up a steep hill ; he pulled up on the brow, and a lovely valley lay beyond at their feet. On the sloping ground across the vale rose the stately pile of Beyminstre, seen plainly through the leafless trees, close to the grey monastic church from which it took its name.

“There is your future home,” said Lord Oswestry.

She once had thought so, but that time was past.

After a few moments spent in struggling with her tears, she said, “If you will not think me capricious, Lord Oswestry, I had rather not go there, now ; I do not wish to visit Beyminstre till I am obliged—till the day I take possession. There are a few things I should wish done, but those I can direct without going to the place, if you will kindly undertake them on my account.”

“You may command me at all times,” he replied kindly. “So we are to turn round and go home, are we? You won’t enter the enchanted castle?”

“Thank you!” she said, in such a heartfelt tone that her companion looked earnestly at her.

“You are inscrutable, Miss Howard!” he returned; “most people, till they try, consider riches as the *summum bonum*!”

“I did, once!” she said; “but I have sobered since that time.” And, rousing herself from her dejection, she gave Lord Oswestry such a lively picture of the petty neglects of her early life, and her juvenile indignation, that she kept him laughing all the way home.

It was a trying evening for Edith—Regina would hardly confess to herself that it was rather trying also to her own feelings. She hurried to the children’s table as soon as the ladies retired from the dining-room, and took Miss Carleton’s hand.

“How do you feel to-night?” she whispered. “Have the children been good?”

“Yes, pretty quiet; but I feel as if I should never get through this evening. If I can but escape being asked to sing.”

“I will sing for you, if it must be. Now, Exmoor, for our game at dominoes.”

Edith was employed in stringing beads for Lady Violet's crochet work; she dared not raise her eyes when the gentlemen came in. Her fingers trembled, and the beads fell about.

"Is not it done? How long you are about it!" cried Lady Violet impatiently.

"Did your ladyship ever try to thread beads when you had a bad headache?" asked Regina drily.

Lady Violet had a certain respect for the young heiress; she coloured, hesitated, and then begged Miss Carleton to put aside her work till to-morrow.

"Well, Miss Howard!" exclaimed Lord Henry, advancing to the table, "I suppose we shall all find ourselves together here again, some time next month."

"I can answer only for my own movements," said Regina; "I don't stir from this spot until we go to town."

"What! you don't accompany the Oswestrys to the Duke's?"

"No! Lord Exmoor cannot spare me," she replied smiling.

“I shall have to call him out, I see!” cried Lord Henry.

“I wish you would!” said Lord Exmoor, looking indignantly at his cousin.

“He takes it quite seriously, you observe,” remarked Lord Henry.

“What is going on here?” asked Sir John Lawler.

“Dominoes!” said Regina, pursuing her game.

“Are you musical, Miss Howard?” inquired Colonel St. Aix.

“I should be glad if you would all go away, and leave us in peace,” cried Lord Exmoor.

“Very!” said Regina, looking across to the colonel.

“You should hear Miss Howard sing a duet with Miss Carleton,” observed Lord Henry, lounging in a chair beside Regina.

“I desire nothing better,” said the colonel.

“Miss Howard is not going to sing,” cried Lord Exmoor; “we have two more games to play.”

“Do oblige us, Miss Howard,” begged Lord Henry.

"I cannot, indeed," said Regina; "ask some of the other ladies, we are all busy at this table."

"Play a six, Miss Howard," suggested Lord Henry, who was looking over Lord Exmoor's dominoes, which he had built up into a little wall in front of him, after the manner of children.

"Will you go, or will you not?" cried Lord Exmoor, flattening his dominoes upon the table.

"Your adorer is becoming warm!" laughed Lord Henry. Edith looked up from time to time, with a restless inquiring glance, but Lord Henry took no notice of her; he went on talking familiarly with Regina, as much as possible to give the other gentlemen the idea that he was very much in her good graces: and, though she liked him less than any man present, yet you cannot live for weeks in the same house with a person without becoming in some measure unrestrained in your manner towards him.

"Where did you drive to day, Miss Howard?" asked Lord Henry, still reclining in his chair.

"I don't know the country; we went through several villages."

"A pretty road?"

"Yes, for the time of year."

"Did the greys go well?"

"Perfectly! No, Exmoor, I cannot; I have not a two."

"I thought they seemed fresh at starting."

"Yes; but Lord Oswestry drives so well."

"And I think you are not timid?"

"Not at all!"

"Try a blank, Miss Howard."

"How dare you, Cousin Henry?"

"I wish you would not provoke him, Lord Henry."

"Your wishes are my law, Miss Howard."

Edith turned paler every minute.

"You spoil these children, Miss Howard," said Lord Oswestry, joining the party.

"Papa, will you take them all away—Henry and the rest?" cried Exmoor.

"I will go at any moment provided Miss Howard will accompany me," remarked Lord Henry, in a tone between jest and earnest.

"I am better off where I am," laughed Regina,

passing her arm round Lord Exmoor as she spoke.

The child kissed her hand, and darted such a look of defiance at his cousin, that all the gentlemen burst out laughing.

“What is it makes them all so merry?” asked Lady Oswestry, looking up from her game of *écarté* with Captain Falconer.

“I congratulate you, Violet,” cried Lord Henry, coming up to her; “your son has just proclaimed his undying attachment to Miss Howard. It is conjectured that the happy event will take place as soon as the parties have attained their majority.”

“I wish he may do no worse,” returned Lady Oswestry. “But it is late—the children ought to be in bed. Miss Carleton, do you know what time it is?”

Poor Edith knew nothing but that Lord Henry had been making love (as she thought) to Regina.

She started up, conscious that she had been neglecting her business; trembling, tearful, and pallid, she cast a hurried look round; Lord Henry was standing by the fire, laughing with

Lady Oswestry about Lord Exmoor's precocious attachment. He did not seem to notice her, and she felt as if she could not part from him in that way, without a word or a look. Regina looked at her with compassion, but a little feeling of superiority glided into her mind. She felt that *she* would not stoop to beg a glance, a farewell, from one who could forget *her*; it might be very proud, and very objectionable, but *she* could not take up her position at the feet of a man who neglected her—No! it was rather reversing the parts that a man and woman ought to play. Her eye wandered over the group by the fire, where Sir Alban was talking to one of the gentlemen, and she complimented herself on the state of indifference to which she had arrived.

And she went on helping Lord Exmoor to pack up his dominoes, spinning out this occupation until she saw that Edith had collected her silks, and was ready to depart. Then she rose to leave the room at the same time.

“Going to desert us already, Miss Howard?” exclaimed Lord Oswestry.

“The faculty recommend early hours, my lord,” she returned with a smile.

She had not noticed that Sir Alban had moved when she did; and she started to find him at the door, which he opened for her.

“Good night, Sir Alban,” she said, bowing.

He held out his hand: the first time since they had met at Piermont.

“Good-by, Miss Howard!” and still holding her hand, he added, “Pardon me if I wish that you would have nothing to do with ‘the faculty.’”

She looked up with inquiring eyes, but the next moment her hand was free, and she was going up the great staircase with Edith and the children, hardly knowing where she was.

And Edith was blushing, radiant with delight; and clasping to her breast a little scrap of paper, which had been conveyed into her hand as she left the room. It contained these pencilled words: —“I cannot speak in this crowd. Do not, I implore you, leave Piermont before we meet again!”

CHAPTER X.

THESE six quiet weeks did wonders for Regina's health and spirits. Perhaps Mr. Dargle's attentions ought not to be overlooked as a secondary cause; for he made a point of seeing her every other day, and gave her a good deal of rose-water to drink in the shape of little pink phials.

He also managed to find out, with a sort of cunning tact which he possessed in no common degree, that Regina was of a serious disposition, that she was very regular in her attendance at church, and that she was well supplied with religious books.

He therefore began to vary the weak draughts with strong tracts, which he produced in a crushed condition from the pockets of his great-coat; hoping, very much through his nose, that the reading of them might be blest to her.

These slight deviations from the ordinary routine of medical treatment rather astonished Regina; but the Low Church, as it is called, had always assumed such an engaging form to her, that even a caricature like Mr. Dargle ensured her respect, though he could not command her sympathy. She felt it was almost wrong to wish he would not talk through his nose, and she smoothed his tracts when she did not read them, and returned them to him with thanks.

It came out, in the course of conversation, that Mr. Dargle was acquainted with Mr. Reynard, and hated him in no common degree. Mr. Reynard had involved Mr. Dargle in a vexatious lawsuit, in which he had lost a great deal of time and money, and in which, even by his own account, he did not come out quite as clear as spring water; but it was equally certain that Mr. Reynard had shewn no ordinary amount of baseness—for the judge had reprimanded the lawyer severely in open court, and had said that no man's hearth could be sacred if such a system of domestic treachery were encouraged. On Regina's happen-

ing to allude to Mr. Reynard as Sir Herbert Wilingham's man of business, Mr. Dargle speedily undeceived her; Sir Herbert's lawyer was in a very ill state of health at the time the baronet desired to make his will, and Mr. Reynard was sent for, as the lawyer was gone to the south of France. He possessed himself very soon with all the details of Sir Herbert's affairs, and, passing himself off as being the regular solicitor, Mrs. Arnold naturally requested him to continue in that capacity. Regina would have been very angry if that could have done any good; but she was in a measure pacified by the certainty—always agreeable to a physiognomist—that she had formed a correct estimate of his features; and by the hope that, if such a man asserted that she could *not* transfer her right to Beyminstre, it was almost a positive assurance that she could do so.

She lived with Edith and the children—helping to teach the two younger ones, walking with them, taking them by turns with her when she drove out.

She grew more and more attached to the pretty

little governess. It was pleasant to feel herself looked up to, and Edith's jealousy seemed quite to have subsided, now that the too interesting Lord Henry was out of sight. He would have been out of mind too, as far as Regina was concerned, had she not now and then suspected that certain letters that came two or three times during this interval, and that caused Edith to be in a tumult of joy and confusion, were specimens of his epistolary talent. At least she knew they were not in Mr. Morley's handwriting, and she could not imagine that there was any other gentleman likely to write to Edith.

Mr. Best still came twice a week to Lord Exmoor; a little neat man who never raised his eyes. Edith was so thankful that Regina was present to help her to receive Mr. Best, that she who had hardly dared raise *her* eyes before, when doing the honours of her school-room, now looked him boldly in the face; and even ventured to bid him come nearer the fire, and condoled with him on his wet ride from the parsonage. Mr. Best, too, to speak figuratively, basked in the sunshine of Regina's presence. Lord Exmoor had suddenly

become well mannered. He placed his tutor a chair, brought down his own books, abstained from spinning tetotums on the Latin verbs, and ate no more burnt almonds while saying the multiplication table.

“Papa and mama come back to-morrow, Exmoor,” cried Regina, who was playing at ball with him, together with Edith and Lady Clara, on the wide landing-place at the top of the double staircase. Lady Violet was walking up and down the long gallery which led from it, with a grey silk mantle and a parasol, giving herself all the airs of a lady at a botanical fête; preferring that mode of taking exercise on a wet day to playing at ball like a child. The others were not troubled with such scruples, and the ball flew gaily from hand to hand.

“I am glad papa is coming back,” cried Lord Exmoor. “Clara and I go every day to his dressing-room.”

“And he gives us all sorts of things,” said Clara, throwing the ball with a mighty effort over her own head.

"Stupid!" exclaimed Lord Exmoor.

"Remember our agreement," said Regina;
"the first quarrel, Edith and I vanish."

"Papa gave me a book the day before he went!"
exclaimed Clara.

"A French book, which she can't read!"
retorted her brother.

"I can!"

"What's the name of it, then?"

"Beauty and the Beast!"

"Oh! that's French—is it, madam?"

"Regina! may not I quarrel?" shouted Clara.

"Try if you can catch this ball instead.
Now," cried Regina, tossing it to Clara as she
spoke.

But the child missed it, and it rolled down the
broad stairs.

At the same moment a gentleman coming up
from the hall, caught the ball and threw it back
among the players.

"Papa!" cried the children, running forward
to meet Lord Oswestry.

He had come home, he told Regina, a few

hours before Lady Oswestry, to meet Lord Henry and Sir Alban, who were expected at Piermont in the course of the day.

Edith's lovely face was crimsoned; but that might have been the effect of the game, or perhaps her embarrassment at finding Lord Oswestry dragged into the circle of players by the children, and waiting for her to throw him the ball.

"I'm so sorry Henry is coming," cried Exmoor, with the frankness peculiar to children. "I hate him!—a great beast!"

"Oh! my dear!" remonstrated Miss Carleton.

Lord Exmoor glanced at Regina, and, seeing that her countenance expressed rather acquiescence than any thing else, he did not repent, but threw the ball to his father.

"I wouldn't be jealous," said Lord Oswestry laughing; "*you* have no reason to complain, I think."

"We were all so very happy," said the child.

"Exmoor, don't talk! mind your game!" cried little Clara, imperiously.

"You look as if you had done with Mr. Dargle,

Miss Howard," said Lord Oswestry, when they were tired of playing, and they were all walking down the gallery towards the school-room.

"He has not quite done with *me*," she returned; "but I think his efforts are principally addressed to my mind."

"Then, I suppose Regina won't drink tea with us, as you are come back?" inquired Lord Exmoor.

"Yes, I shall—unless Lady Oswestry returns to dinner," she replied.

"I do not expect her until to-morrow," said his lordship.

Regina stopped at her own door. She did not make a toilet for these early hours; but she thought Flimsey might as well smooth her hair, which was somewhat ruffled by her exertions.

While her maid combed and plaited her long tresses, she opened a small oaken case that stood on her table, threw back the folding-leaves, and contemplated an exquisite miniature, which reposed on a black velvet ground, at the bottom of the cabinet. She had placed her own innumerable sketches of Mrs. Willingham in the hands of

our first miniature painter, and this delightful portrait was the result.

While she sat absorbed by the past, quite unconscious of the progress Flimsey was making with her *coiffure*, that good soul was dealing about her black pins with an air of mystery that she asked no better than to explain.

“Is it done, Flimsey?” inquired Regina, without even looking in the glass.

“Yes, mem; I have brought the scroll a little forward, mem; if you should approve of the alteration!”

“It does very nicely, I think—no, I shall not wear any bracelets to-night.”

“My lord and Sir Alban has arrived,” said Flimsey.

“Which lord? Lord Henry? I have seen the earl,” said Regina.

Flimsey laid her finger on her lips, and nodded.

“But I am not going down to-night, and therefore they will not influence my dress—stay, I want a handkerchief.”

“ Ah ! ” sighed Flimsey, presenting the perfumed sachet to her mistress.

“ What is the matter, Flimsey ? ”

“ Lord Henry is arrived ; and I am not the only one in the house, or out of it, too, who thinks he had better have gone away, and kept away for ever and ever ! ” cried Flimsey, becoming very energetic. “ There is some people in this house too young for their business, and some too pretty for their business, and some which had better go home to their friends before worse comes of it—as Mr. Edmonds says, and as I think, mem, if you don’t think it too great a liberty my taking to be thinking at all.”

This grammatical address made Regina think, at any rate. She could not be blind to the fact, that the very great number of people who, according to Flimsey and Mr. Edmonds, were misplaced at Piermont, resolved themselves into poor little Edith Carleton.

“ What is it, Flimsey ? ” she asked. “ If you speak plain I may be able to do some good, but I can make nothing of all this.”

“ We all can see, mem, and Mr. Edmonds have

eyes which could see through a brick wall; which he lived with my Lord Pentland before he came to my lord, and saw Lord Henry at his eldest brother's, and says the whole family is tarred with the same stick—if you'll excuse the proverb, mem—and stick at nothing they take a fancy to; and his lordship is always following Miss Carleton about, when no one is by but the children; and the gentlemen down-stairs do say a great deal about it, mem. It is really quite embarrassing to hear them."

"Very well, Flimsey," said Regina, preparing to leave the room; "only I conclude you know that Miss Carleton is a lady by birth and education, and that Lord Henry might be supposed to pay his addresses to her, as well as to any person in this house."

You can't make a lady's maid understand that a governess is any better than herself—the wages settle the question.

"Reely, mem!" said Flimsey, with perfect incredulity.

Regina went to the study with the intention of again remonstrating with Edith on the subject of

Lord Henry; but she had hardly sat down before that troublesome person himself came in, and very much surprised he looked to find Regina among the children.

“Miss Howard!” he said, coming up familiarly to shake hands, “how well you are looking! I am afraid you have not spent your time in regretting our absence.”

“Not the least in the world, I can assure you,” she said, laughing.

“I should think not,” grumbled Lord Exmoor; “and what brings you here, cousin Henry?”

Lord Henry produced a penholder.

“I find myself in a difficulty, and I thought that—how are you, Miss Carleton? I hope you are quite well—I thought Miss Carleton would be kind enough to give me a pen. I can find none in my room.”

Edith rose hurriedly, and began looking in her writing-table.

“I should think Henry was turning author, from his constant want of writing materials,” said Lady Violet, superciliously.

“I don’t believe he wants a pen,” whispered Lord Exmoor to Regina.

Lord Henry was helping Edith in her search, fitting the pens one by one into the holder.

“You received my last letter—from V—— castle?” he whispered.

“Yes!”

“Well?”

“I must think——”

“Have I not given you time to think?”

“No, then,” and Edith left the desk, and sat down by the window in great agitation.

Lord Henry stood arranging his pen for a few seconds, and then said gaily—

“When my poem comes out, Miss Howard, will you engage to read it?”

“Not I, indeed!” said Regina.

“Pray, do you mean to honour us by appearing in the drawing-room this evening?”

“Certainly not.”

“You wish to drive me to despair!” he replied, laughing as he left the room.

“It is over, Regina,” murmured Edith. “I ask

but one thing—that you will never mention his name again.”

Regina pressed her hand. “I promise you not to speak of *him*,” she said; “but you will let me talk a little about yourself. Should you find it painful to remain here, don’t forget that you will always be welcome at Holmwood. As soon as I am of age, I shall be able to do the honours to you myself—but you will be well cared for in my absence, as I told you once before.”

Had Edith been wise she would have sent in her resignation the next day, and been off to Holmwood in a week—but she hesitated. She could not help thinking, even then, that Regina must be partial to Lord Henry—that perhaps, mixed with her kindness, was a little anxiety to get rid of a dangerous rival. She thanked her friend, and said she would reflect—she had no plea to urge to Lady Oswestry at present; but if any excuse should suggest itself, then—perhaps—she would leave Piermont.

It was perhaps fortunate for Regina that she had not exercised her fancy in anticipating any

very cordial effusions from Sir Alban on his return. His interest appeared to have subsided with her improved health; and while Lady Oswestry was extolling her bloom, and appealing to him to echo her compliments, he stood by coldly listening, and bending his head when an answer appeared inevitable, in a way that made Regina tremble with anger.

The house was now full of company. Regina held herself aloof as much as possible from everybody; there was nothing congenial to her nature in people of that class. Perhaps, to a poetical and sensitive girl, whose ideas of duty were very keen, it was not altogether pleasant to receive the most devoted attention from a number of men, who she knew would never have taken the trouble to pick up her glove had she (the same beautiful, spiritual Regina) not owned a hundred pounds in the world. She disliked the women, with their smooth unmeaning phrases; their ostentatious goodness; their committees and charity fairs. She hated to see young women of rank sewing coarse clothes from the poor basket, when

a few shillings would have been kindly bestowed upon hiring a needy workwoman to do that which disfigured them and their drawing-room. She disliked their bitterness to each other, their coarse flattery of the men, their putting their persons up to sale—not like the quadroons at New Orleans, shrinking and broken-hearted; but gladly and boastfully, and full of indecent joy and triumph when they found a buyer.

Lady Oswestry, to do her justice, would have nothing to say to the poor-basket. A great deal of clothing was given away at Piermont, but it was made down in the village, and well paid for. She shivered at the coarse little bedgowns that a Lady Adeline and Lady Charlotte were sewing one evening, and making a feeble attempt to conceal from the gentlemen as they came in from the dining-room.

“Now, my dear child—no Americanisms, I entreat!” cried her ladyship, withdrawing the rough little garment from Lady Adeline’s dainty grasp. “Look, Henry!—look, Captain Falconer! This is what the New Yorkers would call a young lady’s

envelope; and I should think a hedgehog might wear it with impunity! But to put an infant into this hair shirt—certainly, Adeline, your notions of penance are rather premature.”

“Oh! Lady Oswestry—you really—it is for papa’s tenants, poor people, you know—that we are working!”

“But poor people, when they are a month old, have very tender skins, though you wouldn’t think it!” exclaimed Lady Oswestry; “still, my love, don’t let me interrupt your charitable works.”

The young ladies, seeing that Regina was quite the centre of attraction to the gentlemen, tried to enlist her services in their cause; but, fortunately, she was just going to the piano, and she took care to keep out of their way during the rest of the evening.”

“I did something for you while we were away,” said Lady Oswestry, when Regina took refuge beside her; “as you would not come with us to V—— Castle, I asked Lord Ellesdon (the duke’s eldest son, my dear) to come here. Just before the season—you know; don’t you feel grateful?”

"I have no words to express my thanks, Lady Oswestry."

"It is no laughing matter," urged her ladyship; "you can do no better than that. I thought I was acting very unkindly by Henry; but I felt it my duty to give you a chance."

Regina only laughed. But she saw that, whenever she spoke or was spoken to, Sir Alban kept his eyes fixed upon her. It made her quite irritable. A party of young people can hardly assemble together without talking some nonsense, and a very good thing it is, for what young people mean for sense is generally too foolish to be borne—their nonsense is more passable. However, they began exchanging their ideas on the subject of love, which was very refreshing—the more so as scarcely any one present knew any thing about the "genuine article"—although they were doubtless familiar with some of the thousand copies that Rochefoucauld speaks of.

"Do you believe any one can love twice?" asked Lord Henry, sitting down by Lady Charlotte."

"Ah, no!" replied Lady Charlotte, stroking down the gathers of her little nightgown.

"What do you say, Miss Howard?" asked Lord Oswestry.

"A dozen times!" she retorted; "each one better than the last. Practice is so improving!"

"Naughty girl! Is not she, Loque?" cried Lady Oswestry, nursing her little spaniel.

"I quite agree with Miss Howard," said Lord Oswestry, "or else how shall we account for the endless marriages that take place every season? I suppose, Lady Charlotte, that even you will hardly assert that all the brides of all ages who are led up the steps of St. George's Church, bestow their hands on the first object of their choice?"

"Ah, no!" said Lady Charlotte, flattening the seam with the top of her thimble, and casting up her eyes; "but how many unhappy victims marry from pique—to conceal a broken heart from the world!"

"Yes!" echoed Lady Adeline, threading her needle; "*we* have no cloisters!"

"Fore heaven, this is a more excellent song

than the other!" exclaimed Lord Henry. "'A new way of taking the veil!' I think that shall be the title of my comedy, Miss Howard; my play, you know, that you won't promise to read."

"I *will* promise to read it, if that is to be the subject," she replied, laughing; "yours will be a 'Comedy of Errors'—of all errors the greatest; I suppose the object in a marriage of pique is to mortify the inconstant suitor, instead of which he would be excessively flattered. Now, though a woman might bring herself not to wish him any harm, it is going too far to sacrifice herself in order to afford him a pleasure."

Sir Alban looked at Regina, as if to make her address him; but she had no such intention.

"That's right, Miss Howard!" said Sir John Lawler, dragging his chair close to her seat on the sofa; "that's what I say—let's have no pique, but marry a fellow whom you like, and who likes you; and then, whatever turns up—why, you have had a fair start."

"I quite agree with you, Sir John," she replied.

This acquiescence delighted him so much that,

thinking to contribute very greatly to her amusement, the worthy baronet exclaimed, "Will you have a game at dominoes? Now, come! don't say no!"

"Thank you, Sir John," said Regina, trying not to laugh; "but I am not very fond of dominoes: I make them an excuse for flirting with Lord Exmoor, that is all."

"Well, Miss Howard," said Sir John, "so long as it is only my Lord Exmoor, who is, I suppose, about eight years old——" here his eye sought Lady Oswestry.

"Oh! don't ask *me*, Sir John," replied Lady Oswestry; "I can't remember all their ages—he may be eight by this time. Time flies so!" sighed her ladyship, fixing her brilliant eyes on the chimney clock.

"Well! so long as it is only little Exmoor," resumed the baronet—"why, I don't care!"

"You see," exclaimed Lady Oswestry, "you have Sir John's permission to play at dominoes with Exmoor!"

"And to play, I hope, at piquet with me," said Lord Oswestry.

“ Oh, yes !” cried Regina, rising quickly ; “ then one need not talk to any body.”

“ What do you play for, Oswestry ?” asked Captain Falconer, coming to look over the players.

“ We are not so mercenary as to play for any thing,” answered Regina, taking up the cards to deal.

“ Oh ! when people don’t play for money, they are said to play for love,” remarked the captain with his sneer.

Sir Alban overheard the captain’s witticism, and “ looked ugly at him,” to quote John Bunyan’s expression. He kept Regina in sight as long as he could ; but as soon as she had finished her game she stole off to her room, according to her usual custom.

“ He may stare as much as he like !” she thought, “ he will not be much the wiser. I don’t mean to make him my confidant. If he chooses to think Sir John his *remplaçant*, let him ! It is not very well bred to stare a woman out of countenance—but, no matter !”

CHAPTER XI.

IT happened, perhaps not unreasonably, about this time, that Edith fell ill. Mr. Dargle said she had the influenza, and that name did as well as another for that heart-sickness to which young ladies are unfortunately liable. It had the good effect of delivering her from the children, too; for Lady Oswestry, though not the most anxious mother in the world, disliked an epidemic in the house, and of all epidemics, her ladyship told Regina, influenza was the most catching.

“ You have only to look at a person, my dear, even if they are half a mile off, to find yourself sneezing directly,” she informed Regina. And Miss Howard was therefore carefully excluded from Edith’s room. Even Lord Oswestry particularly requested that Miss Howard would oblige

him by running no risks. They were so soon going to town, and she was now so well, that he should be quite mortified if she made her first appearance under the least disadvantage.

Lord Henry was still louder in his entreaties. "Good Heaven! he hoped she would not think of going near the governess—a nice little creature, to whom he knew Miss Howard had been very kind. But really compassion should have its limits:" he entreated her to be very careful, not even to walk down the gallery.

It was not exactly to oblige Lord Henry that Regina kept away; but she felt that, in common courtesy to her host and hostess, she must not run the risk of spreading the dreaded complaint all over the house. She contented herself with writing a few lines to Edith every morning and evening, just to shew her that somebody in the world thought of her, and was willing to amuse her.

The children were placed under the charge of Mademoiselle Laurette, the young ladies'-maid; and, as her control was merely nominal, Regina

had them with her nearly as much as she pleased. Lady Oswestry had a charming little morning room which opened into the conservatory, and among the very few simple and natural tastes which she retained, was that of tending some few choice flowers which were ranged near the door of her boudoir. She liked, too, to gather her own nosegays—for the jars in her peculiar room; and she did not forget Regina, whose love of flowers was even greater than hers. One morning Regina was in this room with the children, reading them a story, while their mama was amusing herself in the conservatory beyond. She had a remarkably soft voice, and it gave Lord Oswestry the most intense pleasure to listen if he could by some rare chance induce her to read aloud. He happened to come in to ask some question of his lady, and remained lounging on the sofa, very willing to postpone his curiosity till she came back again.

It was not a room that any one would be in a hurry to leave: it was small and light, and fitted up with that pretty kind of chintz that looks like Chiné silk; a few bright pictures of the modern

school, two or three parian statuettes, some bronze and silver objects of *virtù*, were tastefully arranged about the walls and shelves. And while you reclined upon a chair, soft and elastic as a floating cloud, the perfume of roses and violets was wafted around, while your eye was attracted by long vistas of camellias and other gorgeous blossoms, ranged in a deep bank along the hothouse walls.

Lady Oswestry, in a close-fitting grey merino dress, trimmed with perforated cerise velvet, was moving gracefully about—now raising her handsome hand to gather a flower above her head; now turning to disengage her dress from the angle of a stand; now beckoning to Sir Alban to come and help her in her morning task.

It was the little fairy tale, *La Belle et La Bête*, which belonged to Lady Clara; and Regina was reading it to the children in French, much to the delight of Lady Violet, who used to do her utmost to imitate Miss Howard's rapid pronunciation.

But sometimes Miss Howard came to a pause altogether, for she caught little bits of Lady Oswestry's dialogue with Sir Alban, and she

wanted to hear the rest. She was saying something about Beyminstre—such a very odd subject to entertain *him* with—and he was gathering here and there, under her direction, a moss-rose or a cluster of azalias.

“ Her improvements have been in very good taste, with one exception, that looks rather mad, I think (Oh! that striped camellia! a little lower down—more out of sight); and that is, she would insist, against my lord’s advice, on moving the conservatory away from the house, farther off, quite on the other side of the cedars—I don’t know if you are acquainted with the situation?”

“ Perfectly.”

“ Then you see how strange it was; but the furniture of the lower rooms is magnificent! and——”

Regina, who was reading how the merchant gathered the fatal bunch of roses, now came to a full stop.

“ Oh, Regina!—quick!—go on!” cried the children, eager to hear what came next.

She went on reading; but soon her attention wandered again to the conservatory.

“Certainly men are the strangest creatures!—do you like jonquils? I may gather one, I think—they blow well this year, don’t they?—Except Sir John Lawler, whom I quite revere, you have none of you the heart of a mouse. I wouldn’t let a beautiful young——”

Sir Alban laughed, and, as they were walking down the conservatory, their voices died away.

So did Regina’s—just, too, as the merchant had brought his daughter to the mysterious palace, and they were sitting down to supper together.

“What next?—oh! pray, go on!” cried the children.

“You tire Miss Howard—take yourselves off with your book,” said Lord Oswestry.

“No, no!” said Regina. “I am not tired; but the scent of the flowers makes me feel idle, I believe. Now, Exmoor, what do you think is coming?”

Lord Exmoor, pale with excitement, leaned on her knees and fastened his eyes on her face.

“I don’t know whether it is your reading, Miss Howard, but *I* feel quite impatient for the

dénouement,” remarked Lord Oswestry. “Eh!—what is it, Alban?”

Sir Alban, who had just entered through the glass doors, stopped short, and looked coldly from one to the other; for Lord Oswestry was in a corner that was not visible from without; and he had fancied Regina was there alone with the children.

“Lady Oswestry sent me here for her garden-basket,” he said, after a moment’s pause.

Lord Oswestry looked round carelessly, and, not seeing it, dropped back again on the sofa.

Regina left her seat, and quietly handed it to Sir Alban.

There was a dignity, a want of pique, about her manner towards him, that he was likely to feel very keenly. He lingered, and tried to catch her eye; but she went back to her low seat among the children, and took up her book.

“There! you naughty Exmoor! You have lost my place,” she cried.

“I’ll find it!” exclaimed Lady Clara, turning the leaves.

"I'll find it before any of you," said Lord Oswestry, reaching down for the book and presenting it graciously to Regina.

Sir Alban was obliged to retreat, and as he left the room he heard Lord Oswestry exclaim with a laugh, "I dare say he would have liked to stay—we all look so very comfortable."

The story was just finished when Lady Oswestry, with Sir Alban carrying her basket, appeared at the open doors. She held up her garden scissors in sign of attention, and waited till Regina had read the last page, before she entered.

"Does she not read beautifully?" she asked, turning her graceful head over her shoulder to address her question to Sir Alban.

"Beautifully!" replied Lord Oswestry with emphasis.

His voice, so like Alban's, deceived Regina for a moment into the belief that his cousin had answered, and the colour rose into her cheeks.

"I am saving my best bouquets for the ball I mean to give before we go to town," said Lady

Oswestry, coming close to Regina, and dropping one by one some beautiful flowers in her lap; "but I can afford you a few to-day, notwithstanding."

"Oh! thanks, thanks!" cried Regina, seizing and arranging the blossoms as they fell. "No more, Lady Oswestry; I have more than my share already."

"You shall have one of my yellow azalias," said her ladyship; "they are so sweet!" And she stooped over the basket that Sir Alban still held, turning the flowers with her long white fingers till she found what she sought. "'Sweets to the sweet!'" she said archly, touching Regina's face with the azalia, and then smiling at Sir Alban.

The bend of the head with which he received this sentiment was too much for Regina. She carried off her irritation by a quotation from the same play.

"'Beggar that I am! I am poor even in thanks—but I thank you,'" she said, courtesying to Lady Oswestry, and holding out her disengaged hand to Lord Exmoor, who seized it eagerly.

"Where are you two going?" asked Lady

Oswestry, who had already begun to refresh one of her jars, with the assistance of Sir Alban.

“We are going to follow your good example,” said Regina, pointing to the jar behind which Sir Alban was standing: “don’t grudge me *my* cavalier, Lady Oswestry!”

A glance, the first she had addressed to Sir Alban, seemed to point this remark, and to associate him with his splendid hostess. At least so he thought, for he started.

“Oh! you know it is a settled thing between you two,” said Lady Oswestry, laughing, and giving something between a push and a caress to her son as he passed her.

“And you will show me the picture of your lovely lady?” asked Lord Exmoor, as they were leaving the room.

“Yes, yes!” said Regina.

“What lovely lady?” asked Lord Oswestry.

“Marie Antoinette!” she replied.

“No! I don’t mean her,” persisted the child; “I mean the lovely face with dark hair—you never told me the name.”

Regina ran out of the room. Sir Alban let the basket fall. Lady Oswestry said, laughing, "Well! about a lady, there can hardly be a mystery."

Lord Exmoor hastened after Regina and caught her dress. "I am very sorry—what did I say? have I done any harm?" he asked.

"No! my poor child," said Regina, stooping to embrace him; "only, that lady is dead, and I loved her; and therefore I don't speak of her to people who did not know her, too."

Lord Exmoor, who was only too sensitive, burst into tears; and while he was sobbing on her shoulder, and she doing her best to soothe him, Sir Alban begged her pardon, and passed her on his way up-stairs—and she had the conviction that he had been just behind, and had heard the little explanation that took place.

"Let him!" she said to herself; "he cares for no one; he has never addressed me a word even about his own mother. It is clear that I did not know him—and he does not know *me* yet."

If he did not, he seemed anxious to improve his knowledge; for, whenever she appeared, he did

not for a single moment cease to watch her. He listened to her words, he studied her countenance, he moved into the music-room when she went to the piano, he crossed the drawing-room if she took a chair out of his sight. It was not to last long, or she would not have borne it—but they were to go to London in ten days, and she had heard him say he was not going with them.

One evening she did think she had got rid of him. Lord Henry, who seemed rather more intimate with him than other people (and it did remind her a little of the liking between Charles and Buckingham), had taken him off to the library, just as Lord Oswestry took her into the music-room. Sir John Lawler followed her to the piano, and, seeing a volume of Schubert's *Melodies* on the desk, asked her to sing *Horch, horch, die Lerch*, which she did exquisitely. Directly Sir Alban heard her voice, he came back and took a seat in the drawing-room, close to the open folding-doors, but out of her sight. Lord Oswestry was not contented with one song, he asked for another and another, till at last, as there were some other young

ladies to exhibit, Regina left the piano, book in hand, and sat down beside him inside the folding-doors, close to Sir Alban, without seeing him.

She was turning over the leaves of the last song, and Lord Oswestry was looking over her.

"I cannot think why you like that screaming thing, *Die nonne*," she said.

"If you must have the truth, it is because you sing it with so much pathos," he replied.

"Do I? well, I pity nuns extremely."

"And yet, if you were a Catholic, I should be half afraid you would end that way."

"I assure you I have not the least vocation for the cloister—I think it a horrible imprisonment."

"And yet, you see, it is a common refuge for people who have undergone great sorrows."

Regina looked up at Lord Oswestry, wondering to what he could allude.

"You will not deny that you have suffered," he said; "the very tone of your voice betrays it—you are not one who can take coolly the ordinary bereavements and sorrows of life—that is all."

"The only sorrow a woman could escape by

going into a convent," said Regina archly, "would be, a bad husband! All other sorrows she would carry with her; now, that is a grief I don't suffer from yet."

"It is a grief you are very careful to avoid, I think," said Lord Oswestry; "but we shall see what you have to say to Lord Ellesdon."

"I am all impatience! but, seriously, I will tell you what I think will suit me better than a cloister. When I come of age, I shall have all the summer before me. I shall take a cottage at the Lakes with a real widow, if I must have a *chaperon*, and I shall make excursions all over that district. Then I shall go back to Holmwood, and live there till I have arranged some plan by which I can, without infringing the proprieties, travel to all the countries I wish to see. I shall consult you, if you will still permit me."

"I shall always be delighted to be of service to you; but all this time you forget Beyminstre."

"Oh! I shall never live at Beyminstre——"

She stopped, for Sir Alban was close to her, looking at her with astonishment.

The same half smile that he could not interpret stole over her face. She held out her music-book and said calmly—"Perhaps you will have the kindness to lay this down on the piano," and so put an end to the momentary embarrassment on both sides.

A day or two after, she was crossing the inner court before dinner. It was the shortest way from Regina's staircase to the drawing-room, and, in mild weather, she always took that path.

The orange-trees had just been put out for the summer, for in that sheltered situation they ran no risk, and one or two had already begun to blossom. She stopped an instant to enjoy the delightful perfume.

At the same moment Lord Oswestry came out of the door at the foot of the opposite staircase, and met her.

"Do you like them?" he asked, and gathered her a cluster that had just opened.

"Thank you! Are they not delicious?"

"I do not think so. The perfume reminds me of the flavour which I detest, and which Chiffon puts into all the sweet things."

“After all, I must not wear these,” said Regina — “they are only for weddings. Will you take them back?”

“Why, they are still less appropriate to me; for ‘the happiest day of my life’ came off a good many years ago.”

“Oh! do you mean your wedding-day? Is that the subject of the farce which the Lydiards are going to play? ‘The happiest day of my life!’”

“Yes! and a very good farce it is; though I am afraid you will find it wretchedly performed.”

Regina had given him back the orange spray.

“But you must not return it—that’s too bad!” he said.

“Oh, dear! but Lady Oswestry will make such a jest of it.” And she put the blossoms into the pocket of her dress.

He stood laughing at her. At this moment Sir Alban came through the court.

“We are taking up the path,” she said, stepping close to the tree.

Sir Alban bowed in passing. Lord Oswestry

offered Regina his arm, and they went together into the drawing-room.

Sir Alban looked hard at her as she entered; but she walked past him without the slightest glance, and took her usual seat by Lady Oswestry.

“Look here! what my lord has given me!” she said, drawing the broken spray a little out of her pocket.

“I declare I shall be jealous!” exclaimed Lady Oswestry, who, with a woman’s quickness, knew perfectly that Regina would never give her cause.

“What an odd creature it is!” she said, turning to Lord Henry; “look how she has crumpled up her flowers, and put them in her pocket.”

Lord Henry replied by a commonplace almost too silly to record—That the man would be very happy for whom she would wear the orange blossoms.

And Sir John Lawler found a moment before dinner to exhort her thus:—

“I tell you what, Miss Howard—here’s a talk about nosegays and orange flowers. I’m not a man to be frightened at a young lady’s ‘No!’ No means

‘Yes’ nine times out of ten. If you are agreeable, so am I. Come, now!”

“We are both very agreeable, Sir John, but I wish to lead a single life.”

“Ah! so you say! But I may flatter myself I am not repulsive to you?”

“Oh! what an idea!”

“And you will allow me to take you in to dinner?”

“Certainly!”

She rode out now with the others. She had not forgotten her early lessons on the Shetland pony. Her figure, and her seat, and her riding-dress, were all much admired, but she was used to compliments—she set them down, more than was true, to her fortune, and believed nothing that was said to her.

“Do I sit right? Do I hold the reins properly?” she asked Lord Oswestry; and, when he told her plainly she did, she was satisfied.

They were a large party, riding in the park, and they halted after a long gallop on a rising ground commanding the stream.

“You must build a bridge across your river at Beyminstre, Miss Howard,” said Lord Oswestry;

“there’s no bridge any where—it must be very inconvenient.”

“Something pretty and gothic, like the house,” said Lady Oswestry.

“The river looks so wild and natural, I think it would be almost a pity,” answered Regina.

“Oh! I vote for a bridge!” cried Sir John Lawler.

“And there’s so much excitement in building,” remarked Mrs. Falconer.

“What do you think, Sir Alban?” asked Regina, pointedly addressing him, as he sat proud and cold on his horse close to her.

“You must excuse me, Miss Howard, I am no judge of the picturesque,” he said, and he reined back out of speaking distance.

Regina smiled a little. “He will not understand,” she thought; “he does not choose to imagine that what little I do to Beyminstre I wish should be in accordance with his taste, that he may not have any thing to undo when he receives it. Blind! but no matter—he has lost the power to wound me now!”

CHAPTER XII.

THE prospect of this ball was now the prevailing topic, not only at Piermont, but all over the country.

To some, it was the very climax of their hopes to obtain an invitation at all; to others, the mere invitation was almost worthless unless it was accompanied by the offer of remaining at Piermont till the next day. The Chillingworths, who were asked, were in this latter predicament. Lady Oswestry had filled her house with people she liked better, and Mrs. Chillingworth had the vexation of allowing to her intimate friends, that though her family had cards for the ball, yet they were not invited to pass the night at Piermont.

Miss Carleton was now recovered from her

illness, and the children were again assigned to her charge. She seemed to Regina to be singularly anxious and restless in her countenance and manner—she was depressed too; but that, if she had really had the influenza, was not at all surprising.

Much to Lady Oswestry's vexation, Lord Ellesdon only made his appearance the day before the ball, and he was to leave Piermont the day after. This was hardly giving him or Regina a fair trial; for her ladyship, never very serious on any subject, was rather tired of advancing the views of her cousin Henry, and she thought it would be an amusing variety to tempt the heiress with another bait.

"We are all in despair, Miss Howard, I assure you!" exclaimed Lord Henry, as Regina entered the drawing-room before dinner.

"Why! what is the matter?" she asked, going quietly to her accustomed seat in the corner of the sofa.

"Lord Ellesdon is arrived, my dear—that is all," returned Lady Oswestry, lifting her spaniel out of

Regina's way; "he is safe in the yellow room overhead, and he is so very dazzling that these gentlemen think you will never look at them again."

Regina seldom knew whether her hostess spoke in jest or earnest; she leaned back in her corner, and took up a Chinese screen.

"Queer set of people, the Chinese!" said Sir John Lawler.

"I don't know what we should do without them," observed Regina.

"How so?"

"Because we get our tea from them."

"I tell you what, Miss Howard, we should all be a great deal better without tea than with it."

"I cannot subscribe to that opinion, Sir John."

"What is it that makes all the ladies so nervous in these days? Why, tea! However, if we were to put an end to the Chinese, why, the niggers could grow as much as we wanted, I dare say."

"I say, Miss Howard!" exclaimed Lord Henry,

crossing over to her, "I cannot think what became of a pair of compasses I left on the library table this morning—and I accused you in my heart of having carried them away."

"Look, Miss Howard!" said Sir John; "here he comes; do you call him good looking? I think he is as ordinary a fellow as ever I saw."

"I did not steal your compasses, Lord Henry," began Regina, interrupting herself to bow to Lord Ellesdon, who was presented to her at the moment, "but I have some idea who is the guilty person."

"Permit me, Miss Howard," interposed Lord Henry, very vain of shewing Lord Ellesdon that he was on the best terms with the heiress—"you could never be said to *steal* any thing I possess, for it would become yours from the moment you took a fancy to it."

"But allow me to represent that I had no fancy whatever for your compasses; I saw them to-day in the school-room (Lord Henry coloured a little), and I took for granted that Clara had picked them up in some of her wanderings. It is her

way. She has at this moment a jet bracelet of mine, a gold thimble, and two pairs of Swedish gloves."

"Oh! Clara is the Gazza Ladra—is she?" said Lord Henry. Lord Ellesdon, who had been seized upon by a countess and her daughter as soon as he entered the room, now turned round, as he stood on the hearth-rug, and surveyed Regina from head to foot, very properly desirous of ascertaining whether she was worth his future attentions or not.

At the same time Regina had an equal opportunity of examining Lord Ellesdon, and making up her mind whether she should like to buy him.

He had a heavy countenance, such as was common in the reign of Henry the Eighth—with a low forehead, and a great deal of face below the mouth—like Thomas Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, for example. You often see such faces now, among the waggoners of Surrey and Sussex. He looked proud, and dull, and honest, was perfectly without affectation, and, considering the position he held

in society, had not an exaggerated notion of his own importance.

He was not struck dumb with astonishment at Regina's beauty—he had seen too much in every style for that; but he thought he had never met with a face whose expression pleased him more, nor a figure more gracefully proportioned. Her voice seemed to him her greatest charm, its tone was so sweet, and its accent so fresh and varied. Every word she spoke had its fullest meaning, yet without the slightest effort. He was just thinking of something to say to her when dinner was announced, and Sir John Lawler carried her, quite out of his reach, to her old place beside Lord Oswestry. And in the evening there was Colonel St. Aix making fierce love to her, and Lord Henry going on pretty much as if he was engaged, and Sir John pursuing her; so that Lord Ellesdon, who rather required to be sought, did not speak a word to her, but resumed his after-dinner conversation with Sir Alban. He wished to go up the Nile, and was anxious to learn something about Egypt.

"Do you know what those two are talking about?" asked Lord Oswestry, coming up to Regina's chair for a minute.

Regina had heard every syllable, but she didn't choose to say so.

"Ellesdon wishes to go up the Nile."

"Very well! It is a very natural wish—so do I!"

"Then, Miss Howard, here's a chance for you."

"I suppose I ought not to understand; but I do: and I think you are very absurd."

"I assure you I don't know a better way of your visiting the country."

"Then I shall stay at home."

"I tell you what, Miss Howard," interposed Sir John, who had dimly caught enough of these few sentences to have an idea that she wanted to travel, "I tell you what—home is home; but say the word, and *I'll* take you all over the world—to Labrador or Cochin-China, if you like—as Lady Lawler, of course."

"That's very kind, Sir John; but, as I said just now, I had rather stay at home."

“Well! and you do a wise thing. All these places are very pretty to read about; but when one hears of all the creeping things, which few people are candid enough to put in a book, why, I say, you won’t mend matters by going out of England. However, so long as you will take pity on me, you shall go where you like!”

“Only, I wish to remain single, Sir John.”

“Ay, ay! single!—young ladies always say that.”

And Sir John went contentedly to pay his devoirs to Lady Oswestry.

Perhaps Mrs. Flimsey had never in her life been in such a tremor of excitement as the evening when she was dressing Regina for the ball.

“The *tabliaux*,” she informed her young lady, “was nothing to this. Oh, my lady’s dress was so lovely! Mrs. Cleaver had taken her in to see it while the ladies were at dinner. White gauze, with broad gold stripes, and gold ornaments—every thing gold! And Mrs. Falconer was in pink satin; and the Misses Chillingworth had blue tarlatane dresses, with no style at all in them.” And

poor Regina had to hear the dress of every lady staying in the house; for Flimsey had made the round of the dressing-rooms under the wing of Mrs. Cleaver, and she was unwilling that so much experience should be lost. And when the toilette was complete, and her young lady stood before her, in her spotless white crape, and wreath of white camellias with their stiff shining leaves, Mrs. Flimsey was ready to take her affidavit that Miss Howard would be the beauty of the room, and, what was more, that my Lord Ellesdon would think so.

What Lord Ellesdon thought did not come to light. He had asked Miss Howard for the first quadrille that morning, and she had replied she was engaged. And she made the same answer to all the other gentlemen who invited her. Lord Oswestry came up to her as she stood by the side of his lady in the ball-room.

"You dance, I suppose," he said; "you, who do every thing well?"

"Yes, I am very fond of it—I am engaged to dance with Lord Exmoor."

“On my word, he takes care of himself betimes! Who will you have next?”

Regina looked half shyly up to him, as if she said—

“*You* have not asked me!”

“I thought you would prefer a younger man,” he replied, laughing. “Will you do me the honour to waltz with me?”

“With pleasure!” she said, looking very happy.

Lord Henry came up after the quadrille, while she was standing talking with Lord Exmoor, and invited her to waltz.

“I’m sorry I am engaged,” she said graciously.

“*Après?*” he said, looking insinuating.

“I do not dance more than twice, my lord.”

“I am very unfortunate to-night,” he said carelessly; and he went off to Lady Oswestry.

“I think,” said her ladyship, “another time, Henry, when you wish to dance with an heiress, you might as well take the trouble to secure her before the ball begins.”

“It is harder work than I bargained for, all this,” returned Lord Henry.

“True! but Beyminstre!”

“It is near Piermont, that is its great attraction to me,” said Lord Henry, sliding off with her in the waltz.

Sir Alban, who was not dancing, seemed to find sufficient occupation in watching Regina and Lord Oswestry. Nothing could be finer than their dancing—the perfect grace and perfect decorum of both. He held his *valseuse* as a good Frenchman does—unlike the frenzied clutch of most Englishmen—so slightly, that it seemed her own act that made them float round so securely together. It was all smooth and quiet, and strictly in time. She looked so happy, too; her dark grey eyes kindled, her cheek coloured, her polished hair glancing like a mirror as she whirled rapidly round.

Sir Alban’s countenance did not seem to reflect the gaiety that was pictured in hers. He looked graver and more gloomy every minute.

“Don’t dance the *Deux-temps*—it is not worthy of you,” said Lord Oswestry as they were starting.

“I will not! I detest it!” she replied.

When they fell out of the circle, they were close to Sir Alban.

“Don’t you dance, Alban?” said Lord Oswestry.

“No—never!”

Colonel St. Aix came up at the moment, and invited Regina for the polka.

She declined. Sir Alban looked blacker than before.

“I wish you would exert your influence with your ward,” said the colonel; “I was just as unfortunate the other evening, when you gave the charade.”

“If I had any,” said Lord Oswestry.

“If you would but grant me a quadrille,” urged the colonel; “but really it is too bad to let Lord Oswestry engross you in this way.”

“We have not finished our waltz,” said Regina smiling.

“That’s what I complain of,” said the colonel; “if my lord would let me take his place for the other half, I should say that was a fair arrangement.”

“Do you think I would pay Miss Howard so bad a compliment?” returned Lord Oswestry, laughing.

“And you know how soon I am tired,” she said, looking up to Lord Oswestry. “I limit myself to two dances—because, otherwise, I should dance all night, and repent it all the next day.”

“I am afraid you are not very strong,” said Lord Oswestry; “but just a few more turns.”

And they glided off into the circle again.

When the waltz was over, they went to the refreshment-room, and, while Regina was eating an ice, Lord Ellesdon came in with his partner, and addressed Miss Howard, not to ask her to dance, but to have a little conversation.

“You are going to town immediately, I believe?” said Lord Ellesdon,

“Yes—the day after to-morrow.”

“You will be presented?”

“I believe so.”

“You mean to patronise the Opera?”

“I hope we shall. It will depend on Lady Oswestry how often we go.”

“ You sing, I understaud, Miss Howard ? ”

“ Yes—in the country.”

“ You admire Mendelssohn, I conclude ? ”

“ Not so much as the earlier German composers.”

“ They are famous for shooting in this county, I think—do you belong to the archery club ? ”

“ No ! I am no archer—I have not even a bow.”

“ Arrows in plenty,” remarked Lord Oswestry.

“ I hope you do not mean that for wit,” said Regina, looking up at him with a shy archness.

“ No—simple matter-of-fact.”

“ I trust,” said Lord Ellesdon, “ that I shall often have the pleasure of meeting you in town.” And with this gracious wish, to which Regina responded with a gracious bow, he left the refreshment-room with the lady, who had just finished her lemonade.

“ The pleasure will be all on one side,” said Regina, as Lord Oswestry led her back to the ball-room.

“ I cannot think what makes you so cruel ! ” he replied.

They were standing arm-in-arm at the side of

the room, watching a spirited galope, Sir Alban standing near, and following them with his eyes.

“Why—do you consider Lord Ellesdon’s conversation amusing?” she asked, looking puzzled.

“No—but as good as you generally get.”

“What! I am to hear that at every ball in London?”

“Yes—thereabouts!”

“Why, I thought London conversation was so famous,” she urged.

“Ay! that is dinner-talk at some few houses; not that I like it—I think it is very fatiguing. I had rather eat my dinner in peace.”

“What a material confession!”

“And you will not dance any more?”

“No—I am plotting how to make my escape.”

“When we go to supper take a wrong turning, and vanish down the corridor. Keep early hours while you can.”

“Then I must go by myself,” said Regina, looking with some dismay at the closely crowded doorways.

“I am just going to waltz; but here is Willing-

ham doing nothing—he will give you his arm to the foot of the stone staircase, and then you know your way.”

She would have given the world to stop him; her cheeks burned—but what could she say? She saw Lord Oswestry take Sir Alban by the arm and whisper to him; she saw Alban’s head inclined as if in assent.

“I have settled it with Alban,” said Lord Oswestry, coming back to her; “you will keep in the corridor—for I won’t have you cross the court in the night-air.”

“Oh, thank you! they go up the double staircase, do they not? I feel your kindness so much—for I am tired already.”

“Was that my fault? Did I make you waltz too much?”

“Oh, no!—it has been my great pleasure of the evening dancing with you. I am so afraid with other people, that they would not keep time, or that they would tear my dress.”

“Yet that is a fault you of all women would forgive.”

“Only it looks so untidy—a long trailing flounce, or a great gap in the skirt.”

“It was so kind in you to dance with Exmoor; and yet I was half provoked—for there were twenty people making interest with me to ask you for the first quadrille.”

“But do you know I had been engaged to Lord Exmoor for the last fortnight? Besides, next to yourself and that peculiar Lord Ellesdon, whom you seem rather to admire, he was the greatest person in the room—was he not?”

Lord Oswestry laughed, and stood looking down on her absorbed, as he often was in her presence. Her beauty, her artlessness, and that peculiar feeling of tranquillity which some people seem to impart, soothed him like a spell.

And as he never made love to her, and it never crossed her mind that he would, she treated him with all the freedom—not of a brother; she never pictured him in that relation, but rather as if he had been the elder brother of Sir Alban.

But, had it not been for her preoccupation, she did not know the danger she would have run.

He roused himself after the pause of a minute, during which her intense gaze had rested on his face, as if she was waiting for him to speak.

“Lord Ellesdon a favourite of mine! Not in the least, I assure you. But a single man, with his prospects—I should not be doing my duty as your guardian, if I did not present you to such people. You can make your own choice afterwards.”

“I wish you would leave a little of your duty undone; but I suppose, if I had all the logic of Bacon, I should never be able to persuade any man that I desired to remain single.”

He looked at her with his brief smile, and made no reply.

“Well, I am going now,” she said, with a little petulant movement of the head.

“You are not angry? On my word I would believe you if I could.”

“Lady Oswestry has sent me to take you to supper,” said Lord Henry, coming up to Regina; “you owe me this, as you would not dance with me.”

“No, thank you ! I am not going to the supper-room,” she replied, drawing back.

“Miss Howard is tired,” remarked Lord Oswestry ; and he made a sign to Sir Alban, who came forward and offered Regina his arm in silence. Her slender glove rested on it for the first time. Lord Henry, bending by her side, walked down the room with them.

“I am rather jealous of my cousin Oswestry,” he said. “He is a first-rate waltzer ; but, on my word, it is too bad his engrossing you in this way.”

“*You*, Lord Henry ? you come out in a new character,” she replied, laughing ; “now you are jealous of Lord Oswestry’s waltzing—you are quite right. It is perfect !”

“You are too severe ! But you know to what I allude ; Lady Oswestry and I have been laughing about it—nothing would be so delightful as to see Oswestry the victim of an unhappy attachment.”

“What nonsense grown-up people will talk !” she said ; but she was a little perplexed by this

banter, and she glanced from Lord Henry to Sir Alban, whose reserved countenance afforded her no glimpse of what he might think or feel.

Lord Henry left them at the door, and they passed out into the corridor. The keen change of atmosphere made her shiver; and that trifling circumstance brought two things forcibly to her mind—the chilling cold she had felt the night of Mrs. Willingham's death, and the time when Alban would have noticed the slightest inconvenience she suffered, and when he used to wrap her up so carefully, to protect her from the evening air after her visits at Dykeham; and this was Alban, this frigid person who was walking slowly and silently down the cloistered passage by her side. Once she hazarded a glance towards him, and she was startled by the expression of his face—he was looking so pale and stern.

They were at the foot of the staircase, and she was just withdrawing her hand from his arm, when it was seized, clasped with energy, and Sir Alban exclaimed in a voice that he could hardly control to make audible:

“Regina! stop! I must speak to you.”

She felt as if she must have sunk down on the stairs, her heart beat so fast she could neither see nor hear distinctly. After a moment's pause—a struggle for breath—she returned—“What have you to say to me?”

“I have wished and sought for this occasion,” he said, “almost ever since I have been here—and now it comes, though I shall give you offence, I dare not pass it over.”

“Offence?” Her eyes raised to his seemed to say that it would not be easy to offend her. She was very angry at his folly for having delayed to speak so long—but it was not the sort of anger that could not be appeased.

“In every way my task is most ungracious,” he went on; and he still held her hand, and still every phrase was accentuated by the nervous pressure of his fingers—“Lord Oswestry has been my warmest friend; and you watched over my mother's dying bed.”

She looked, all inquiring.

“Yet—for your own sake, and for his—I must

urge you from the bottom of my heart to beware of Lord Oswestry."

She turned as pale as death. "Lord Oswestry! the kindest friend I now have in the world!"

"Listen to me, Regina," he said, and he seemed as much agitated as herself: "Lord Oswestry in all his dealings with his own sex is the very soul of honour—to me he has shewn the interest of a brother; but there is a class of men who, where women are concerned, are governed by no law. I give you a most unwelcome warning—but you do not know the peril you are in, nor the arts you have to oppose."

"And this is added to the rest!" cried Regina, disengaging her hand and confronting him with flashing eyes. "You think so basely of me, that you pretend not to see, in my single case, where a kind interest exists, without a thought of love or even admiration. You cannot see that a man (of his age, too) may feel some compassion, and even friendship, for a woman committed to his care! The case would be too simple with any other, but all *I* do is so distorted in your mind, that I am

the object of suspicions which I cannot bring myself to utter !”

“ I have gone too far to recede !” he exclaimed ; “ it must all out—hate me, look down upon me, I may yet do some good ! I heard them talking of it in the ball-room ; Lord Oswestry has never been without an object—one has succeeded another all his life. I need not veil the fact to you ; you are in a circle where these things are freely discussed. He is not like many—his sensibilities, his feelings, are to be gratified. He is disappointed in his marriage ; you know it. He is always fancying himself attached—he has always been successful—and now his heart is occupied, they say—they, smiling and jesting as they pass about the scandal—they say that his new attraction is for once to be found under his own roof. He loves his ward !”

“ They lie !” she retorted, shaken from head to foot with a passionate gust of scorn and anger.

“ Be warned, Regina !” he resumed ; “ you don’t love him yet. Be willing to hear the bitter truth. He has every virtue but this—every merit, every

attraction, if you please, but this; but he loves you, and he has never loved in vain!"

"If it were worth my while—if I cared to explain to you," said Regina, moved a little by the intense emotion of her companion, "what his conduct has been to me ever since I entered his house. He does not admire me—except, perhaps, just my singing; his wife is a thousand times handsomer! a modest woman (if you can suppose me such) always knows when she is admired. I am safe here."

But Sir Alban was unconvinced.

"You are ignorant of all your own feelings. You blush if you do but hear his footstep—you are happy when he is near you—you are silent and grave when he is absent—any one could tell by your countenance whether he is in the room—I have seen you tremble when he has offered you a flower. You are blind, not safe, Regina."

As Sir Alban enumerated these instances, she could recollect them one by one; and she knew it was some association with him, and not Lord Oswestry, that had caused her emotion. But this she could not and she did not wish to reveal.

"I prize his kindness and his friendship," she said; "I have good cause to value them when all others have failed me! I trust Lord Oswestry; and, still more, I trust myself!"

She took a step on the stairs, and her fine gesture and dilated eyes expressed the noble confidence she felt.

He let his hand fall on the carved scutcheon at the foot of the balustrade, with an action of complete despondency. He had no more to say.

She gained her room in a tumult of feelings—of anger, pride, and hope.

"He cares for me, or he would never have given me this warning," she thought.

As soon as she could arrange her ideas, she began to think there might be some truth in what Sir Alban had said. It might be true that people who knew Lord Oswestry's habits thought he was attached to her, and imagined that she might return his preference. This was all that could be true—and this was not enough to make her resign the advantage of remaining with the Oswestrys until she was of age. No! she would prove to

people, and Sir Alban at their head, that they were mistaken in their opinion of both parties. And when Flimsey removed the wreath from her beating temples, and hoped her young lady would sleep well after her excitement, she was far from guessing the state of perplexity in which Regina was left. She could make nothing of her position. She could not tell what to do. She could only look forward to June as the happy time that would put an end to all her troubles—that would, as she hoped, place Sir Alban as master of Beyminstre, and dismiss her to begin her cottage life again.

CHAPTER XIII.

It would not excite much attention, she thought, if she were to keep her room until dinner-time the next day. She was not in a mood to be teased by Sir John Lawler, nor bantered by Lady Oswestry about Lord Ellesdon. The guests would all be dispersed in the course of the morning, except Lord Henry, who was to go with them to town; and he was so perfect a cipher in her opinion, that she did not care whether he was there or not. Sir Alban was bound for Cheltenham to visit some Indian friends, and she supposed he would hardly stay at Piermont till the last minute. She was glad to be spared meeting him again, after what had passed—his unjust, cruel suspicions—it would be difficult to know what to say or do if he were there to watch her every

word and look; and she remembered with keen indignation, that, though he had warned her of the dangers of her present position, he had suggested to her no alternative. She should like to know (from curiosity) what he would advise. That she should go by herself to Mivart's Hotel, perhaps, and there await her coming of age! These reflections were interrupted by Lord Exmoor's little knock. He was come to breakfast with her, by appointment.

He brought her a large nosegay of wild violets, which he had gathered for her in the park before she was awake, he told her. Regina said she had been awake a long time; but she thanked and petted him, and placed him before the table, that he might pour out the chocolate.

"Miss Carleton is crying this morning; so much, you can't think," said the child.

"I am sorry for that—have you been teasing her?"

"No! I am always very good now. Cousin Henry's valet brought a little note to the door; but that could not make her cry—could it?"

Regina said "No!"—but she could not get the note out of her head. She supposed it must have been a farewell; but, as he did not leave till the next day, she rather wondered why he had not preferred a personal interview, which, with his skill and experience, he could have so easily obtained; but she was very glad he had taken a more distant method of proving his gallantry. Edith would cry, of course. Regina hoped that it would not be very long before she would feel that she had much greater cause to rejoice. She thought that she would go and see Edith after luncheon: no doubt the poor child would prefer being alone just at first; at least if she were to judge of others by herself. So while Flimsey packed, under her supervision, her bedroom door being left open, Regina gave Lord Exmoor a little biscuit jar in which he was to arrange her violets, while she read out to him "The ugly duck," by Hans Andersen.

Then Mrs. Cleaver came with a scrap of perfumed paper from Lady Oswestry, to which Regina replied on another scrap; and the correspondence

went on for half an hour, to the great amusement of Lord Exmoor, who collected all his mother's notes and ranged them along the table, insisting that Regina should tell him what she said in reply to each.

This was the correspondence :—

“ Make haste down-stairs, *belle paresseuse* ; you are expected with the utmost impatience by a crowd of adorers. You turned all the heads and won all the hearts last night ; and every time the door opens a certain noble and taciturn earl looks round only to be disappointed.—VIOLET.”

“ I'm so busy, dear Lady Oswestry.

“ REGINA.”

“ What in the world have you to do ? You are not down on your knees packing your own trunk, I suppose. Colonel St. —— declares every five minutes that you are an angel ! A friendly baronet assures me privately that he should never ask an angel to be Lady L——, but that he knows a

beautiful woman who is worth all the angels in the world. The heir-apparent is growing cross.

“V. O.”

“I am sorry for it; but I am reading to *your* heir-apparent one of Andersen’s tales.—REG.”

But the tale was finished at last, and Lord Exmoor dismissed to his dinner. A showery afternoon gave her an excuse for not taking her regular walk. She drew her chair to the fire, took down a volume of Walter Scott, and at last, after reading till her eyes were weary, fell fast asleep. She was awakened by a loud rapping at her bedroom door, and the voices of Flimsey and Mrs. Cleaver in eager consultation.

“What is it, Flimsey?” she cried, starting up, confused by the bustle, and surprised to find that while she slept the twilight had come on.

“Oh, mem!” cried Flimsey, rushing in, too glad to be the first with her news, “her ladyship is in historical fits!”

“Lady Oswestry! what is the matter, Cleaver? pray, come in!”

“I took the liberty, Miss Howard, of coming to you,” said Cleaver; “I thought if you would have the goodness to see my lady, she is in such a state!”

“But what has happened?—Lord Oswestry——” cried Regina, hurrying with Cleaver into the gallery.

“My lord is just come in, I believe, Miss Howard; but if you would only go with me to my lady.”

“But I don’t know whether she would like to receive me,” said Regina, stopping short; and, seeing Lord Oswestry coming out of his lady’s dressing-room, she went up to him, and hoped that nothing serious had happened.

“Nothing serious to herself, Miss Howard,” he said; he looked annoyed and contemptuous, but not distressed. “It concerns Henry Montresor.”

“Has any thing happened to him? I am very sorry for you both,” she said, trying so palpably to get up an interest on the occasion, that he could not help smiling; but he looked grave the next moment, and said, “I am afraid you will be

more vexed than my lady, though in a different manner. If I can be of any use to you, command me." Then, opening the door for her, Regina passed in, and found her ladyship walking about the room, not at all in the melting mood, but with blazing eyes and dishevelled hair, in a towering passion.

"That worthless girl, Regina!" she cried, turning round fiercely—"I could not have believed it! I thought her a poor whining simpleton, but steady! And see what it is to rely upon any one!"

"What girl?" asked Regina, while she felt a sudden pang at the heart.

"Why, Miss Carleton! my meek little governess! However, I'm glad of it! If ever there was a man to make a woman repent such a step, it is Henry Montresor! He will break her heart, that's one comfort!"

"Edith! eloped with Lord Henry?" cried Regina, clasping her hands.

"Even so, my dear! pretty, modest-looking creature! Mrs. Falconer always told me she was a sly one!"

“ Oh! Lady Oswestry! She was in the school-room this morning; Exmoor told me so!”

“ They went off after luncheon,” said Lady Oswestry, calming by degrees, and taking her seat on the sofa by the side of Regina; “ so like Henry—he would not get up an hour earlier to run off with the handsomest woman in England!”

“ But then, Lady Oswestry—oh! it cannot be too late—let them be followed! Oh! if I could but see my lord! She will be wretched, married to such a man—there is surely time!”

Regina burst into tears. Lady Oswestry laughed.

“ Married! my dear, your *naïveté* is amusing. He, the most dissipated man in England, marry a little governess like that! Why, Henry *could* not marry, unless for money; he is crippled with debts—but you want to talk it over with my lord? I shall like to hear you! Cleaver, go to my lord’s dressing-room, and tell him we shall be glad of his company.”

“ Oh! Lady Oswestry!” Regina could hardly speak through her tears—“ Edith could have had

but one idea in accepting the addresses of Lord Henry."

"My dear! when you talk of addresses, depend upon it she knew what to trust to. Why, if he paid her attention, he either wished to break her heart, as he sometimes does—or to carry her off, which is more likely, for she is very pretty; but, either way, I will never forgive her, or him either," she added, between her teeth.

"I am sure of Edith," said Regina; "I know her well! I don't defend any woman who elopes; but I am certain that she has left your house in the firm belief that she goes to become the wife of Lord Henry."

Lord Oswestry had entered while she was speaking.

"I wish her joy of her belief! she will soon be *désillusionnée!*" cried Lady Oswestry, with a scornful laugh; "but she knew what to expect. Cleaver tells me that he used to steal up to the school-room of an evening, when she pretended to be ill. Now, really, putting all together, perhaps we had better not go into the details of the case!"

Regina turned with a look of entreaty to Lord Oswestry.

“I wish I could serve you,” he said; “you feel this very much—I am sorry for it.”

“Oh! can she not be brought back?” asked Regina.

“My dear Miss Howard, this young person has gone of her own accord—I have no right over her—had she been carried off by force or stratagem—in fact, had the affair happened a hundred years ago, I should be already in pursuit of her.”

“I am sure of this,” said Regina, wiping her eyes, “that the moment Edith learns that he does not mean to marry her, will be the last instant she will consent to pass in his company, even if she leaves him on the high-road.”

“How if they should be in the express train?” asked Lady Oswestry, laughing.

Lord Oswestry’s looks expressed the most unbounded contempt for his lady’s want of feeling; but he never took the trouble to remonstrate with her.

“We must wait now,” he said; “nobody

seems to have an idea which way they are gone. She must have slipped out directly after luncheon. If she should prove worthy of your interest, you may still have it in your power to serve her; and, if not—but I hope, Miss Howard, that your regrets on this matter belong exclusively to the lady?”

“Quite so, I assure you,” she said earnestly.

“And now, my lord having proved that he is not quite infallible,” remarked Lady Oswestry, “I suggest that we all think about dressing for dinner.”

Decidedly Lady Oswestry was not so agreeable when you were in distress as when you were gay and happy; there are so many people who are only kind when you are not in want of kindness. It was not a very cheerful dinner to Regina. All the guests except Sir Alban were gone. He took in his hostess, Lord Oswestry gave his arm to Regina. The shock she had received about Edith diminished the awkwardness she would otherwise have felt, in meeting Lord Oswestry after Sir Alban's warning. Indeed she had been some time in his company before it recurred to her

memory. They all behaved, outwardly, just as usual; and in this consists the difference between really high-born people and the middle classes. The former are just as angry and quarrelsome; but they can slip on their masks quicker than the latter. If such a scene had happened, among the Ramsays, for instance, Regina knew exactly how they would have gone on. How Mrs. Ramsay would have sat at table with a swollen face and a large handkerchief worked up into a ball in one hand, and every now and then burst out into a blubber, with a sudden explosion like a whale. She had seen it once, when she had accompanied her grandmama on a visit of consolation, because one of Mrs. Ramsay's sons had run away and engaged himself on board of a coal barge.

She could not but look at Lady Oswestry in her green velvet, with a gorgeous bracelet on her rounded arm, leisurely eating her soup, and raising her dazzling eyes (hardly the worse for her passionate tears up-stairs) to Sir Alban, as she engaged him in some trifling conversation.

“Have you seen the Asclepias, Miss Howard,

that Harley brought into the corridor to day?" said Lord Oswestry.

"I hope they are not Hoyas!" exclaimed Lady Oswestry; "we shall have their horrid sickly odour all over the house."

"What are they, Edmonds, do you know?"

"No, my lord, I do not," replied that gentleman solemnly.

"See Harley about it, and tell him that your lady does not like Hoyas. I was not aware that they had any perfume at all."

"Oh! don't you remember, at the Peckham ball, that strange woman who was introduced to me, and would keep haunting me, with branches of Hoyas in her hair? I assure you (to Sir Alban) I fled into every corner of the room, with those dreadful clusters pursuing me—so intent was she upon following up the introduction. I actually persuaded Captain Fanshawe and Henry Montresor (a sob) to dance with her continually, as the only means of keeping her out of the way."

Regina was astonished at her ladyship's self-command, but it was beyond her imitation. When

they left the drawing-room, she told Lady Oswestry she was fairly exhausted, and she went to bed at once. Lady Oswestry, who was always kind to bodily ailments, came and sat by her, and insisted on her having some very choice tea made, and hoped she would forget all about that miserable little wretch, who had made her so bad a return for her great kindness. "For, my dear," said her ladyship, "how did she know but you might have wanted Henry for yourself?"

Regina came down to breakfast the next morning, looking pale and harassed. Lady Oswestry, who had just taken her place at the table, was speaking to Sir Alban. She made them a sign of recognition, and went to her chair.

"She has not slept well," cried Lady Oswestry, "after all the advice and the orange pekoe that I bestowed upon her last night. Now, my dear, be a philosopher; turn your thoughts to another subject, as my governess used to tell me; reflect upon your *Manteau de Cour*, or upon your silent earl, if you like that better."

"What earl?" asked Sir Alban, looking startled.

"Earl of Ellesdon! Do you mean to say he is not silent?"

"You see she smiles when I mention his name—that is a good sign."

"Who would not smile, Lady Oswestry?" said Regina; "you couple things so strangely together."

"Well! as my lord does not seem disposed to come in (he is having some more last words with his steward), I may as well open the bag and dispense the letters. Sir Alban has been casting impatient looks in that direction for some time."

"Your ladyship has an accusation for every body, this morning," said Sir Alban. "I expect no letters; I am as little afflicted with correspondents as any one can be."

"There's the *Morning Post* first, for you," said Lady Oswestry, throwing it to Regina. "You can see if your friend's marriage has got into the papers already."

Regina coloured, and looked pained.

"Here is one for you, Sir Alban," continued her ladyship, "all the more precious for being unexpected; it seems to have followed you from the uttermost parts of the earth—stamped, and marked, and re-directed, so as to be hardly legible."

“For me?—Yes! I had left Cairo, and it went on to Bombay, I see,” remarked Sir Alban, while he unsealed the letter, “and back to Cairo again.”

He stopped short—his colour changed—his hands trembled; he looked across at Regina, but her eyes were bent upon the columns of the newspaper.

“I hope (if it is not indiscreet) that you have received no bad news,” said Lady Oswestry, remarking his agitation.

There was a moment’s silence; Regina looked up and recognised Mrs. Arnold’s handwriting—the last letter she had ever written, which had not till that moment reached its address. She could even read, as he held it, on the reverse of the page, the old-fashioned signature, larger than the rest of the writing—

“REGINA ARNOLD (NÉE DE LAVAL.)”

So many thoughts and feelings rushed into her mind, that she turned quite pale, and felt faint and giddy; but her pride saved her from a scene.

“No bad news, thank you!” he said with an effort; “not any news.” And he rose and went to the window.

Lady Oswestry looked at Regina as much as to

say, "What is the matter with him? Can you make it out?"

Regina sipped her tea, and looked unconscious.

At this moment Mr. Lefevre entered, with a request from the gardener that Lady Oswestry would step for a minute into the conservatory, to decide what flowers she would take with her to town.

"Excuse me, my dear, and do the honours for me," she said, as she left the room, pointing to the tea-service.

Regina took her ladyship's seat, and glanced towards Sir Alban, who was standing, still reading his letter, by the window. "I cannot now reproach him for not answering a letter that he never received," she said to herself; "but, after all, that one incident does not change my estimate of him, nor his of me."

It required some courage, she felt, to address him; but after sitting a little while, in contemplation of the empty cups, she turned round, and said in a calm distinct voice, "Shall I give you tea or coffee, Sir Alban?"

He came suddenly up to her—placed the letter in her hand—threw himself upon the chair next her, and looked into her eyes for a reply.

She met his gaze with her clear earnest regard, folded the paper slowly up, and gave it him back, saying only—"I have seen it before!"

Lord and Lady Oswestry came in together—Regina went back to her own seat.

"That stupid Harley!" began her ladyship, "he pretended he could not cut the flowers without me. Why, Sir Alban, you have had no breakfast!"

"Thank you, Lady Oswestry, I have done."

"You have not begun, you mean."

"Have I not? Yes—coffee, if you please."

"He looks as if he had seen a ghost," said Lord Oswestry.

Sir Alban tried to laugh.

"You must come up to town as soon as you can," said Lord Oswestry. "I feel pretty sure of the appointment—but still there is nothing like being on the spot."

"What appointment, may I ask?" inquired her ladyship.

"Military secretary to the new governor of Madras," replied Lord Oswestry.

"Dear me! shall you like going to Madras?" asked Lady Oswestry, turning to Sir Alban.

"Very much," he replied, with his passing smile.

"And when do you sail?"

"With the governor, I hope, in November."

"There is time, then," thought Regina; "June comes first?"

"I don't think a hot climate suits you," said Lord Oswestry.

"I know it does not," returned Alban.

"Then why do you go to such a horrid sandy furnace as Madras?" cried Lady Oswestry, opening wide her beautiful eyes.

"Because, like Hamlet, 'I lack advancement,'" said Sir Alban, smiling again.

Regina remembered the passage, and that which followed.

"The succession is nearer than he imagines; blind that he is—what does he think I mean to do? What will he say, when I put him in possession? That I shall never know, for I will never see him again. If he should then wish to atone, it will be too late—there will be no way then left for him to prove his faith in me." While these reflections were passing through her mind, she heard, as if in a dream, the voices of the others

talking and laughing around her, till she was roused by Lord Oswestry saying to her—

“And you, Miss Howard—among the many places you wish to visit, had you ever a fancy to go to India?”

“No, not quite so far as that,” she replied.

“Only to Egypt with—I mean like—Lord Ellesdon,” added Lady Oswestry.

“I shall have an opportunity of judging to-day,” said Lord Oswestry, “whether you have the qualities of a traveller or not; whether, for instance, when you have gone two or three miles, you suddenly discover that you have started without half a dozen important packets which you really cannot leave behind.”

“Just like Mrs. Falconer! I am sorry to speak ill of a friend—but she always forgets something when she goes on a journey.”

The carriage was announced to be ready.

“Well, Alban!” said Lord Oswestry, shaking hands with his cousin, “if you do not follow us soon, I shall think that a very particular motive detains you at Cheltenham.”

“Oh! I think so, already,” said Lady Oswestry, laughing.

“ I am sure there is a lady in the case ; but I can tell you she will have a hard battle to make me give up Mootee to her, whoever she is.”

“ Then, till I claim Mootee at your hands, Lady Oswestry, will you do me the favour to suppose that I am free ?” asked Sir Alban, giving her his arm to lead her to the carriage.

“ Agreed !” she said ; “ but, stop—I declare, if it were possible, I should say that was Henry Montresor’s voice !”

“ I hope not,” said Lord Oswestry, looking displeased.

“ It’s past praying for, though,” she retorted, turning back to laugh at Regina.

At the same moment Lord Henry rushed in through the open doors, breathless with haste and excitement.

“ I have no time for excuses ! I cannot enter into explanations !” he exclaimed—“ but answer me, for Heaven’s sake ! Do you know what has become of Edith Carleton ?”

END OF VOL. II.









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